

BETTY GORDON

and HER SCHOOL CHUMS



By the Author of
RUTH
FIELDING



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Betty Gordon and Her School Chums

OR

Bringing the Rebels to Terms

BY

ALICE B. EMERSON

AUTHOR OF "BETTY GORDON AT BRAMBLE FARM," "BETTY
GORDON AT OCEAN PARK," "THE RUTH FIELDING
SERIES," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED



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BETTY GORDON AND HER SCHOOL CHUMS

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BETTY GORDON AND HER SCHOOL CHUMS

CHAPTER I

GOING BACK

"I THINK September is the nicest month of the whole year!" said Betty Gordon contentedly.

"You say that twelve times a year," observed Bob Henderson. "Once a month, regularly."

"No, but September is lovely," Betty insisted. "Not too warm and of course not chilly and with a smoky haze—you know," and Betty waved her hand toward the open country.

Bob's laughing face sobered understandingly.

"It's great!" he said matter-of-factly, but the commonplace words carried meaning.

They both lapsed into silence, their eyes roving over the panorama spread before them. The car was standing at a parking station on the outskirts of Washington, and by turning in their seats they could see the beautiful city on which the sun smiled this perfect morning. The Potomac River caught the rays and became a bit of silvered metal ribbon. Ahead of them lay a Virginia landscape,

melting in the distance into the smoky haze that had captured Betty's fancy. Not even the nearness of the bright and garish station with its brilliant red tanks and gasoline atmosphere could detract from the glory of the blue hills.

"I'm so glad we're going in the car!" Betty exclaimed. "The Littell girls tried to get their father to take them up, but he couldn't spare the time. Uncle Dick is a lamb to take us in the machine—he spoils us."

"Speak for yourself, Priscilla!" said Bob, from the front seat. "I haven't liked to mention it—your temper is so lively—but I *have* noticed that you've taken your own way for granted rather often this summer."

Betty shot him a furious look, then melted into a comradely grin.

"If you really mean that—and I know you're teasing—you needn't worry," she informed Bob serenely. "I'll lose my queenly airs with my tan and freckles; all will disappear together, like snowflakes beneath the sun, at Shadyside. Wait till Miss Prettyman takes one look at me."

"She does have an er—reducing effect," admitted Bob. "Remember what she does to Tommy Tucker?"

Betty laughed and the sound was delightful.

"I believe if he saw her hat in the distance," she said, "Tommy would get tangled up with his

feet, whether she was coming his way or not. And at that, I don't blame him much," she added thoughtfully, "for Miss Prettyman's hats are like nothing else I ever saw."

"Much Tommy knows about hats," declared Bob scornfully. "I wonder if the gang all went up on the same train?"

"Yes, Bobby Littell told me they were all going together and that the Guerin girls are joining them at the Junction." Betty nodded. "The Tucker twins and Timmy Derby and Sydney Cooke—all the boys, she said, planned to take the nine-thirty-six local. Remember last year, Bob?"

"Don't I?" said Bob appreciatively. "Perhaps the conductor will miss us this time—or be grateful he has two less to look after."

He raised his arms above his head and took a deep breath.

"Say, Betty," he said impulsively, "it's good to be going back, isn't it?"

The girl on the tonneau seat met the nice, frank gaze of his clear eyes and smiled in response.

"I'm as glad as I can be," she declared, an eager lilt in her pretty voice. "I want to see the girls again and Mrs. Eustice and Miss Anderson—and, oh, how I want to do things, Bob! The second year is so much nicer than the first—nothing will be strange and new now."

A roadster drove in close behind them, and, with a brief "oil and gas" to the man who leaped to be of service, the driver stepped out and closed the side door with a bang.

"Nice morning," he said to Bob, eyeing him a trifle curiously. "I suppose you're going back to school?"

"Yes, Mr. Rice, I go to Salsette," said Bob quietly.

"You do? I was sure I'd seen your face. Do you know my boy? He graduates this year. Name's Roland Rice."

"I know of him—he's two years ahead of me, sir," Bob replied.

"All right, Jim." Mr. Rice caught the garage man's signal. "I must be on my way. Wish you a pleasant trip," he flung over his shoulder as he climbed into his car.

"That's Roland Rice's father," Bob told Betty.

"Roland Rice is that good-looking boy, isn't he?" Betty countered. "The one with dark hair and blue eyes? Tommy Tucker pointed him out to me once."

"Is he good-looking?" said Bob.

"I don't know about him," said another voice. "But Ocean Park surely agreed with Betty—she gets prettier every day, doesn't she, Bob?"

"Why, Uncle Dick!" Betty blushed with pleasure, for compliments of this kind were not show-

ered upon her by a common-sense uncle. "Look at my freckles!"

The tall, broad-shouldered man who had taken the wheel beside Bob turned, revealing kindly, quizzical and amazingly keen eyes and a thin, tanned face that showed many seasons of outdoor life.

"Like freckles—always did," he assured her humorously. "Bob tells me Norma Guerin took the skin off her nose, trying to fade the innocent little freckles she acquired this summer."

"Bob shouldn't be telling such secrets," said Betty severely. "That was in a letter Norma wrote to me."

Bob looked contrite and Mr. Gordon mischievous.

"All set, Jim?" he asked the garage man, who wiped his hands on his overalls and responded cheerfully:

"All set, sir."

The car made the wide asphalted circuit of the station and turned into the oiled State road.

"I hope your patience hasn't been exhausted, children," said Mr. Gordon cheerfully. "I was ready enough to hurry the contract through, but the party of the second part had forgotten her glasses and we had to wait while her son read the papers aloud to her."

"The poor old lady," Betty said sympathetically. "Mrs. Clune forgets her glasses all the time. Once she came to see Mrs. Littell and she couldn't read the street signs, so she went two miles past the corner where Carter and the car were waiting in Washington."

"I'd wait all day for a chance to go back to school in the car," remarked Bob. "Wouldn't you, Betty?"

"Of course," said Betty graciously, her momentary irritation at him forgotten. "The Littell girls were crazy to come, too."

"Well, just once in a long time I like to have my children and no one else," Mr. Gordon announced, with characteristic decision. "It's a relief to be able to see Betty and talk to her without having to sort her out of a group of half a dozen girls. And if I'm minded to call down Bob, I don't forever yearn to first disentangle him from the Tucker twins and eight or nine more young imps."

"Anyway, the car wouldn't hold them all, so it's better not to ask any," said Betty placidly.

For three hours the car sped along through the wonderful countryside, a very beautiful and tranquil picture in the light of that September morning. Two lines persisted in running through Betty's mind:

“Up from the meadows, rich with corn,
Clear and cool in the September morn.”

She was a thoroughly happy girl, she told herself. Indeed they were all happy—those three who were linked in closest harmony and affection, who understood each other so well that they were not afraid of long silences.

Bob broke such an one with an extremely practical remark.

“I could eat,” he observed mildly.

“Beyond that railroad crossing lies our luncheon—at least the prospect,” Mr. Gordon declared, eyes ahead. “Hello, there go the gates!”

He brought the car to a stop within a few feet of the lowered gates and in another moment they heard the rumble of the approaching train.

“Express!” shouted Bob, as the long line of wood and steel and flashing wheels thundered past them. “That’s no nine-thirty-six local, Betty.”

Betty smiled and shook her head, to show she heard. She closed her eyes for the swift movement of the cars made her dizzy. She opened them just in time to see something flutter from a window of one of the cars.

“Something dropped!” she cried. “I saw something fall out of that car, Uncle Dick! Let me get it!”

“Wait till the train has passed,” Mr. Gordon

said quietly. "Just a minute, Betty. All right, now go ahead."

Betty jumped down from the car and ran to one side of the gates, now being raised slowly. She had noted closely where the something she had seen had apparently landed. Sure enough, she found it without groping.

"What is it?" called her uncle, as she came toward the car again.

"A book," answered Betty. "Some child's picture book. I suppose she let it fall out of the window and— Oh, for pity's sake!"

Several strips of paper fluttered from the pages she was turning idly and Betty stooped to retrieve them in surprise.

"They're railroad tickets!" she cried. "Look, Uncle Dick—tickets!"

Bob held out a hand to help her into the car.

"Somebody's out of luck," he observed laconically. "Can't ride on a train without a ticket—that's sure."

CHAPTER II

THE SAGGING WOMAN

BETTY settled back in her place and handed the tickets to her uncle.

"Cincinnati, Ohio, eh?" Mr. Gordon commented, examining the long strips. "That's a loss for some one. I'm sorry. I'll put them away in my wallet, though the chance of the loser claiming them does seem pretty small."

"Let me put them in the book, Uncle Dick," begged Betty. "I won't let them drop out. They'll stay nice and flat between the pages."

"I think they'll be safer with me, Betty," replied her uncle.

"I should say that was rather an expensive picture book," Bob declared, as Mr. Gordon drove the car across the railroad tracks.

"I do hope these didn't belong to poor people," said Betty anxiously. "I'd hate to think that some one who couldn't afford to buy three extra tickets let these blow away."

The book was a gaily printed one with many marginal drawings in colors. Betty, idly turning

the pages, tried to picture to herself the child who had let it drop from the window.

"I hope her mother doesn't scold her," she thought earnestly. "That is, if she has a mother."

For Betty Gordon had no mother to scold or to praise her and no father. She was an orphan and the ward of her father's brother, Richard Gordon, the "Uncle Dick" to whom she was devoted. Something of her life before the bachelor uncle came to look after her is told in the first book of this series, "Betty Gordon at Bramble Farm." It was at Bramble Farm that Betty formed a lasting friendship with Bob Henderson. Because of his mining and oil interests, her uncle was obliged to travel extensively, and though he did his best to keep in touch with his young niece, Betty's experience now and then carried her forward more swiftly than news could reach Mr. Gordon. These conditions were responsible for the predicament that landed her in the household—and the hearts—of the Littell family in Washington and gave Betty the joyous companionship and firm affection of three happy girls and their father and mother, not to mention a plump and romantic little cousin who cheerfully allowed herself to be called "Libbie" to save the confusion two Bettys would surely entail.

From the comfort and luxury of the perfectly appointed Littell home, Betty Gordon went out

to her uncle in Flame City, an oil town with all that that implies of rawness and ugliness, and excitement and power, too. With Betty went Bob Henderson, and that summer, spent in the oil fields, gave back to Bob the "family" of which, up to this time, he had been only dimly aware. He found the sisters of his dead mother and they, as well as he, came into the long-delayed inheritance of oil lands. Mr. Gordon, to the boy's delight, was made his guardian, and the farm days, when Betty had had to coax Bob from bitterness, became not unhappy memories.

It was something of a "pull," but excellent discipline for both, to leave Flame City for school—Betty going to Shadyside and Bob to Salsette Military Academy across the lake. The Guerin girls and a host of Washington friends were registered at the two schools, and the first term went quickly. Good fortune came to the two Guerin girls during the school year, fortune, they always insisted, in which Betty had a part. For the Christmas holidays the hospitable Littells claimed Bob and Betty and "grand good luck," to quote the former, gave them a couple of weeks of "Mountain Camp" before school could claim them again.

At the end of the term had followed a delightful summer at the seashore, where Betty had acquired freckles and a hint of imperiousness.

Here, too, the same friendly crowd of young folk had played together and cemented friendships more closely under the glowing summer sun.

Now summer was over and a new school term loomed ahead. The student in Betty welcomed the prospect of books and classroom, but she owned that it might be difficult to settle down, "just at first."

"I hope, Bob, that you are holding out bravely," said Mr. Gordon, avoiding a depression in the surface of the road by a quick turn. "I thought that Berrytown was nearer. There's a restaurant there which is famous in three counties for its fried chicken."

"I'm not exactly suffering," Bob returned, "but there's a sensation of—of—sadness, I guess, that seems to be getting worse instead of better."

"We're coming to the town now," Mr. Gordon observed. "Keep a look-out for the sign of a strawberry—down near the station, they told me. You feel sad, too, Betty?" he asked her, without turning his head.

"Oh, Bob always starves to death long before I do," she answered cheerfully. "I don't believe they get enough to eat at Salsette, Uncle Dick. Bobby Littell said once that she'd enjoy seeing a boy who didn't want to eat the minute he got into the house."

"That's her mother's fault for having a cook

who can make waffles," Bob retorted. "There's a strawberry down that street we just passed, Uncle Dick. I hope the chicken has gravy," he added.

Mr. Gordon laughed and turned down the next block. The town was laid out in neat geometrical squares and the center of the pattern was the railroad station. The restaurant was within one block of the depot, and as soon as Betty saw the station she thought of the railroad tickets she had found in the book.

"Uncle Dick, wouldn't it be a good idea to ask the ticket agent here about the tickets that fell out of the car window?" she asked, as the automobile drew up before the white and green building from which swung a large and realistic strawberry, painted vermilion red. "He might know what to do with them."

"He could at least telegraph on ahead to the terminal, I suppose," replied Mr. Gordon. "Wait till I see about lunch—dinner I'd better call it down here; I'm getting anxious about Bob's state of health," and he grinned as he disappeared into the restaurant.

"Have to wait half an hour. Sorry, but it can't be helped," Mr. Gordon declared, coming out to them. "You'll have time to go down to the station first. I'll wait here and look over the paper while you and Betty trot down to the station. It

isn't likely the agent will know anything to be done, but there is no harm in asking."

Betty jumped out and fell into step beside Bob.

"Here comes what Tommy Tucker would call a 'sagging woman,' " said Betty suddenly. "Dear me, she does look forlorn, doesn't she?"

The woman approaching them "sagged" decidedly. The effect was partially due to weariness and discouragement and in part to the warm, moist hands of two little girls who clung to her heavy skirts. An older girl walked a little behind her, and all three were weighed down by clothing much too bulky for an early September day.

As Betty and Bob came close to them and Bob stepped back to let them pass, the woman spoke in a tired, querulous voice:

"I told you to be careful, Rose," she said sharply. "Now what in the world are we going to do? I don't even know where we can spend a night."

Betty did not hear the girl's reply, but something in the despairing droop of the mother's shoulders roused her to active sympathy.

"Wait a second, Bob," she commanded, and turned back.

"Can't I help you?" she asked gently, touching the heavy coat sleeve nearest to her.

Faded blue eyes surveyed her dully. The woman's forehead was beaded with perspiration.

"I don't see how you can, but thank you, Miss," the reply came hopelessly. "They put us off at this station, because we lost our railroad tickets. Three of 'em fell out of the car window when my girl let her book drop."

The three children stared at Betty woodenly. She felt confused before such a concentrated gaze, but her hesitation was only momentary.

"Bob!" She summoned the boy in a voice that shook a little with excitement. "What do you think—she says she lost three railroad tickets!"

"Talk about good luck!" ejaculated the delighted Bob. "I mean it will be—that is, it wasn't good luck for you to lose 'em, of course," he stammered, as the woman's obvious bewilderment increased.

"We found the tickets!" Betty cried. "Yes, your tickets! The book fell out of the window at a railroad crossing back there and I picked it up. They must be your tickets!"

"Did they say for Cincinnati, Ohio?" asked the oldest of the three girls eagerly.

"Yes!" chorused Betty and Bob. "Cincinnati, Ohio."

"Then that's them," the girl remarked calmly. "Now, Ma, we're all right again."

"Could I have them back?" suggested the woman diffidently and Betty looked reproachfully at Bob.

"We left them with Mr. Gordon for safe-keeping," the lad explained. "Back at the restaurant. I'll run and get them, shall I?"

"There isn't a train for three hours," answered the woman, rubbing her head with a weary gesture that went to Betty's generous heart.

"There's a porch on one side of the restaurant where you can rest; and it's cool and shady, too," she said impulsively. "Come back with us till train time."

"Let's go and sit down somewhere, Ma," urged one of the younger girls.

CHAPTER III

THE HOUSE OF PENDLETON

MR. RICHARD GORDON, glancing up from his paper some few minutes later, was surprised to see a procession approaching him. First came Betty, talking earnestly to a tired-looking woman, dressed in shabby black. Then followed three girls in Indian file and lastly Bob, whose eyes were dancing, though his face was serious.

"Uncle Dick!" cried Betty, as soon as she was within earshot, "here's Mrs. Pendleton, and those tickets I found belong to her!"

With no fuss or confusion and absolutely no effort on her part, the woman in the heavy black garments found herself seated in a comfortable rocker, a palm leaf fan in her hand. Betty's pretty, eager voice was telling of the meeting and of how the tickets had been lost, and before she had finished Mr. Gordon had taken the long strips of paper from his wallet and placed them in the cotton-gloved hands that closed on them convulsively.

"I don't know a way to thank you," murmured Mrs. Pendleton. Her name, she had told Betty, was Mrs. Laurene Pendleton. "My aunt sent me the money to come to Ohio, and if we had to tell her the tickets were lost, she'd never forgive us. Rose, Mary, Pearl—can't you say 'thank you'? Rose is the one that lost the tickets," she added, at which the oldest girl crimsoned.

They were shy little girls, not very pretty, but with pleasant faces and quantities of light, shining, straight hair. Their black serge dresses were stiff and anything but suitable for summer traveling and each carried a winter coat over her arm.

Across the three blonde heads, Betty's eyes met those of her uncle. He smiled and nodded.

"Mrs. Pendleton," he said courteously, "we were just going in to lunch; won't you and your family come as our guests?"

"We'd love to have you," chimed in Betty cordially. "You have time—you said there was no train for three hours."

Mrs. Pendleton tried feebly to refuse, but the three girls whispered:

"Oh, Ma, please do; Ma, they have ice-water—I saw the waiter with the pitcher, Ma." The most delicious odors floated out from a mysterious door screened with white netting, and Mrs. Pendleton yielded.

"You're awfully good," she said gratefully,

"but four's a lot to invite to a meal. If you're sure we won't be putting you out——"

Fortunately the dinner had been fully ordered in advance, and it was served rapidly and noiselessly. The Pendletons were a trifle awkward and self-conscious at first, but their host knew how to put them at their ease, and before the first course was finished Mrs. Pendleton was talking freely and the children were satisfying their hearty appetites in a manner that pleased Bob and amazed Betty.

"They must have been about starved!" she remarked afterward.

The Pendleton girls had never actually suffered for food, but they were undernourished, since for months their mother's chief concern had been to buy the staples that were cheapest and could be counted upon to "go a long way."

"My husband's been dead nearly two years," she told Mr. Gordon, as she tasted her exquisitely browned chicken. "He wasn't well for a long time before he died, and we had a run of bad luck ever since Pearl was born. She's five now. Mary's seven and Rose is thirteen. My land, they know how to cook chicken, don't they?" she added appreciatively.

"My husband was going to the doctor's the day the house burned down," went on Mrs. Pendleton, spreading currant jelly on her bread. "I had to

drive him over, because he was too nervous to go on a trolley and he couldn't hold the reins—his hands were all puffed up with rheumatism. I was afraid to leave the children alone, but there wasn't anything else to do."

She was silent a moment. Bob surreptitiously pushed the dish of olives nearer to Mary, who had a small mountain of pits on her plate that already betrayed her. Encouraged by his nod, she helped herself to three more.

"Don't let me see you eat another one of those things," commanded her mother sternly. "You'll kill yourself—and we haven't had dessert yet. Rose, cut up her salad for her—she'll spatter the dressing, if you let her do it herself."

"You were speaking about a fire?" said Mr. Gordon quietly.

"Oh, yes, about the fire!" Mrs. Pendleton forgot the olives and returned to her subject. "I drove James to see the doctor and told the children to stay in the kitchen till we got back.

"That's the only room we had a fire in," she explained simply. "We couldn't afford much extra coal. But I had a little wood stove I used in my husband's room when he was sick, and Rose got it into her head that she'd like to have her father's room nice and warm for him when he came back from seeing the doctor. I warned her never to light a fire when I wasn't there, but

you know how children are—they're set on doing things and they always think they know more than their parents do. I used to be that way myself."

Betty looked at Bob, but he was engaged in spearing a purple plum for Pearl, whose round eyes had seldom left the dish of fruit, placed in the center of their table, since she had sat down.

"Rose carted wood to the room where the stove was," Mrs. Pendleton continued, evidently finding it a relief to talk, "and she stuffed enough paper and kindling in to start a volcano. Pearl and Mary tagged her everywhere she went and they watched her light it. It burned fine, she said, and she kept feeding in wood till the sheet iron was red hot.

"It was a downstairs bedroom—I found it handy when James was sick, because I could wait on him and do my work without going upstairs—and opened right off the hall. After she got the fire going good, Rose went upstairs to make the other beds. Pearl and Mary went, too. It never entered their minds to stay and watch the fire."

"And of course it set fire to the house," suggested Bob, who had had experience with wood stoves at Bramble Farm.

"It did," assented Mrs. Pendleton, with a heavy sigh. "Our house stood off a little by itself and the first floor was pretty near burnt out before

the neighbors noticed anything wrong. Then they thought none of us was at home, and if it hadn't been for one woman who dashed in to make sure, these girls would have lost their lives. They all had to jump from the second floor window. The woman who saved 'em was burnt some doing it. James and me came home to find the house and furniture gone and the girls with sprains and bruises, but nothing else."

"What a brave woman she must have been—the one who went in and got the children!" said Betty, her eyes shining.

"She was a brave woman and a good woman; and if the time ever comes when I can do something for her, you needn't be afraid I'll forget," Mrs. Pendleton answered earnestly.

"I never ate pie with ice cream on it," Pearl was heard to remark confidentially to Bob at this juncture.

"If you don't like it, I'll find you another plum," he told her, but she assured him hastily that she "liked it fine."

"Then your husband died soon after the fire?" Mr. Gordon asked, anxious to learn something of the circumstances that had set the forlorn family traveling to Ohio so poorly equipped for the journey.

"Yes, James died about a month after that," said Mrs. Pendleton absently, for "pie with ice-

cream on it" was a novelty for her, too. "He died, and I went to live with my sister-in-law and tried to take in sewing. I stuck it out for nearly two years—James left me some insurance money—but when Aunt Louise Esther wrote me to pack up and come out to her, I tell you I was mighty glad of the chance. She's my only living relative. They tell me she's queer, but at least she's kith and kin of mine."

"Cincinnati is a lovely city, isn't it, Uncle Dick?" asked Betty.

"I won't see much of it," put in the widow quickly. "Aunt Louise Esther lives in a house with a wall around it and she doesn't go out except at ten o'clock at night. She wants me to read to her and do the housekeeping and she'll send the girls to school and let us all have a home with her."

It didn't sound like a very alluring prospect to Betty and Bob, but Mrs. Pendleton was evidently more than content. She considered that good fortune had at last befallen her—there would be food and clothes for her children and shelter. And they would have their chance to be educated.

"She sent us the money for the tickets, too; I think that was real nice of her," Mrs. Pendleton added. "Some people would have sent just the tickets. She said to get anything we needed with what was left, so I bought our winter coats.

I thought that was sensible. We didn't have any good summer clothes, so I put the girls into the dresses they had for best last winter. They've been fussing about the heat ever since we left home, but black doesn't show the dirt and you can't expect to be comfortable all the time, I tell them."

Three flushed little faces smiled responsively at Mr. Gordon's sympathetic glance. The dresses did look hot, even to his inexperienced eyes.

"I hope the worst of your journey is over," he said to the mother. "If you'll let me take you down to the station, I'll be very glad to do so. I have to get these young folk to a definite point this afternoon, or we'd stay and see you off. But you'll not have long to wait for your train now."

The Pendleton family and their wraps were stowed in the car, Bob walking on ahead. He had had a hasty conference with his guardian, who had given him a bill and instructions. As a result, when the mother and three daughters climbed out at the depot, they found magazines, fruit, fancy crackers and candy neatly tied into a compact bundle for them to take on the train.

"I don't believe she has enough money to get proper meals, Bob," Mr. Gordon had confided in a hurried aside, "and she'd be insulted if I offered to lend her any on such short acquaintance. But fruit and crackers are wholesome, and they

can't starve before they reach Ohio—and you might slip this envelope into one of the magazines for me."

When, several hours later, Mrs. Pendleton found that envelope and its enclosure, she exclaimed, just as the donor had foreseen:

"My land! To think I can't even thank him, because we never asked those nice people where they lived."

But Betty had taken care to get the address of Aunt Louise Esther, and she was resolved that the three little girls should be remembered at Christmas.

"I don't believe that aunt celebrates Christmas," Betty said to herself. "Queer people hardly ever do."

They left the Pendleton family a bit dazed, though happy, at the station and drove away.

"Uncle Dick," said Betty enthusiastically, as they struck the main road again and the car gained speed, "have I ever told you how nice you are?"

"Don't flatter the man at the wheel," Mr. Gordon retorted, his smiling eyes on the road ahead.

CHAPTER IV

SHADYSIDE AGAIN

THEY had one puncture, but beyond that the remainder of the trip was uneventful. Late that afternoon they came in sight of the red brick buildings that belonged to Salsette Military Academy. Through the green of distant trees a flash of water marked the lake which lay between the Academy and Shadyside, Betty's destination.

"Well," sighed Mr. Gordon, a bit regretfully, "almost there, Bob."

Bob smiled at him affectionately. He admired and respected his guardian beyond any man he knew.

"Halt!" came the ringing command. "Friend or foe?"

A cordon of lithe young figures formed across the road and Mr. Gordon brought the car to a stop within a foot of Tommy Tucker.

"Friend!" called Bob.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign," directed Tommy.

"Stuffed dates!" Betty cried, waving the box high in air.

Instantly there was a rush, and a swarm of boys climbed on the running boards. Besides Tommy, there was the "light twin," Teddy, Timothy Derby, Winifred Marion Brown—who had with much difficulty educated his friends to use his initials—Sydney Cooke and a merry-looking lad who was a stranger to Bob and Betty.

"He's new this term," said Tommy Tucker, indicating the boy who hung back a little. "His name is Torrey Blake, and he's Gil Lane's cousin."

Bob opened the doors—which was unnecessary, as most of the boys were proficient in what Tommy described as the "touch" system and clung to the car with apparently no more contact than that of a hair or a finger nail—and began to ask questions at a rapid rate. Who was back? What time had they reached the Academy? Was the major still on deck? How did the new wing, built during the summer, look? Did the new crowd size up pretty well?

At the imposing iron gates which guarded the sweeping drive to the commandant's office, Bob was dropped. He shook hands with his guardian, caught his earnest, low-voiced, "Write regularly and remember I trust you, Bob," accompanied by

a significant glance toward Betty, who was laughing at some of Tommy Tucker's chaff.

"Yes, sir, I will," answered Bob, jumping down.
"'Bye, Betty! See you soon."

The seven boys linked arms and disappeared through the gates, each whistling a favorite tune, a musical diversion much in favor at the Academy. Betty took Bob's seat beside her uncle and the car shot down the lake road that would bring them to Shadyside.

"I'll miss my girl," said Mr. Gordon soberly. "But I think you're going to be very happy, dear. You have a host of friends, and by this time you have found your place in the school life."

"I'll write to you more than I did last year," Betty promised, with sudden compunction. "I always mean to write, Uncle Dick, but sometimes I let a week go by. And, much as I love Shadyside, I'd rather go to Flame City again with you."

"And I'd rather know you were in this lovely place," said Mr. Gordon promptly. "I want you to feel that you can depend on Bob, Betty. If you need help or advice while I'm in the West, confide in Bob. He's a good deal older than you are, in experience, at least."

"Oh, I won't have to depend on any one," Betty replied carelessly. "Bob's a dear, but I can take care of myself."

Mr. Gordon sighed, but a moment later smiled

as he kissed her, for they were rolling up the drive to the Administration Building and the steps were lined with girls. They stood in groups, they sat in rows, they clung to the white columns of the porch.

"Betty! Betty Gordon!" sounded a chorus of voices. "Oh, Bobby Littell, here's Betty Gordon!"

For a second time the car was besieged, but now a whole paint box of colors seemed to have been spilled in the sunshine. Red, green, blue and white frocks and sweaters, brown, black and yellow bobbed heads stood out from the gay picture. So many girls kissed Betty that her uncle declared she would be smothered. Laughingly she tumbled out of the car and turned her lovely face up to him.

"Good-bye, darling Uncle Dick!" called her eager girlish voice. "Don't dare to forget to come home for Christmas!"

He left her standing on the wide stone steps and carried away a happy impression of a riot of merry talk and laughter bubbling from a veritable fountain of youth.

"My goodness, Betty, you don't know how good it is to see you," said Bobby Littell, with another of her rare hugs. Bobby was not given to demonstrations of affection. "Let's go up to our rooms and talk. We have the same suite we

had last year! Did you ever hear of such luck?"

In the hall a girl stood at the mirror, fluffing up her hair.

"Hello, Betty!" she said over her shoulder, having in the glass seen the two girls enter. "Awful nuisance to come back, isn't it?"

"Beastly bore," drawled Bobby, before Betty could answer. "This education business does interfere so with one's social life."

Betty tried not to laugh and succeeded.

"I'm glad to get back, Ada," she said sincerely. "It's lovely to see the girls again."

"Take a look at the new class and you'll lose your enthusiasm," Ada Nansen advised her sourly. "I think some of them look too common for words."

"Ada always has a grouch in the fall and after every holiday vacation," Bobby observed, as she and Betty went through the covered passageway into the nearest dormitory. "She gets indigestion at home, I think."

Bobby was accustomed to ascribing every indisposition, from a headache to a heartache, to indigestion. She was an unusually healthy young person herself, mentally and physically, and had small patience with "the blues."

"You stay here," she commanded Betty, when they had reached their rooms, "and I'll go and collect the bunch. I think some of them are down

in the office. I've got a big piece of news to tell you, but I want the Guerin girls to hear it, too."

Betty moved about the pleasant room with a pleased sense of familiarity. It had been "home" to her and Bobby for the greater part of a year. The bedrooms were arranged in units of three, and Betty was relieved to find that the same arrangements were to prevail this term as last. That meant that she and Bobby would have the middle of the three connecting rooms, with Libbie Littell, Bobby's cousin, and Frances Martin on one side, Constance Howard and Louise, Bobby's sister, on the other. Near them, Betty hoped, would be Alice and Norma Guerin.

"We had it arranged just right last year," thought Betty, folding a gay sweater neatly.

Bobby Littell burst in at the door—all Bobby's effects were sudden and her teachers complained that she never seemed to learn to "go quietly"—followed by Alice and Norma Guerin, pretty girls both, and devoted to Betty. They fell upon her now with shrieks of delight, and Louise and Libbie, standing in the doorway, had to wait patiently for their turn.

"How nice you look, Betty!" exclaimed Louise Littell, when Betty had been passed around like a candy box and comparative calm was restored. "Isn't that a new way you do your hair?"

Betty glanced in the mirror and automatically reached for her comb.

"My hat mashed it," she explained, laughing. "Is every one here? Have you seen all the girls? I thought you said you had some news to tell, Bobby."

"Well, I have," retorted that active young person, perching herself upon the footboard of the bed and balancing herself more cleverly than gracefully. "Connie Howard doesn't get here till to-morrow. Frances Martin is due to-night. They say there was an awful howl about the early opening—almost three weeks earlier than last year, isn't it?"

Betty looked at her in affectionate exasperation.

"News?" she hinted.

"Give me a little time," retorted Bobby, who liked to talk. "Abruptness, young ladies, is not a desirable," she mimicked Madame, their French teacher. "But honestly, girls, this is what I want to tell you. Miss Lacey has gone and so has Miss Sharpe. Two new teachers are coming to take their places!"

"Oh, dear!" mourned Betty. "Miss Lacey was nice, and I hate changing corridor teachers."

"Yes, you have to learn their weaknesses all over again," the wicked Bobby commented.

"Miss Sharpe was the best Latin teacher we ever had—all the girls said so," Libbie Littell

remarked. "Though, I must say, she never had much patience!" she added a bit resentfully.

"An angel couldn't listen to your translations with patience," retorted Bobby, with cousinly frankness.

Libbie tipped her over on the bed as payment, and Bobby retorted with a well-aimed pillow.

"Children must enjoy themselves," said Norma Guerin. "Betty, one of the girls told me that Mrs. Eustice was asking about you. Let's go down and see her and gather more gossip. Bobby always gets the advance telegrams in some mysterious manner."

"I'm a good listener," Bobby informed them gravely. "Wait till I brush my hair and I'll go down with you. Mrs. Eustice always makes me remember the snap fastener I forgot to sew on."

The girls laughed, but they knew what Bobby meant. The exquisitely groomed principal, though always dressed very simply, set them all a high standard.

"Hark!" whispered Betty, as they reached the office on the main floor of the Administration Building. "That's Ada Nansen!"

"And she's peeved!" added the irrepressible Bobby.

CHAPTER V

SETTLING DOWN

THE girls hesitated a moment as a high-pitched voice sounded out from behind the office door.

"But, Mrs. Eustice," Ada Nansen was saying heatedly, "I don't think it's one bit fair. Miss Lacey understood distinctly that I was to have that room if Coralie Swan didn't come back. She promised it to me."

"My dear girl, I don't know anything about that," replied the calm, unruffled tone of Mrs. Eustice, the principal. "As I have told you, Miss Lacey was called home almost as soon as school closed by the illness of her mother. She has a furlough for a year. Miss Anderson kindly helped me out in the assignment of rooms this fall, and she has given that room you wanted to two freshmen. You and Ruth have the same room you had last year."

"Miss Anderson did it purposely!" flared Ada. "She knows I detest those Guerin girls, and to have to share a unit with them."

"That will do, Ada," said Mrs. Eustice.

The voices dropped to a low murmur.

"I must say, I think if there's any hardship, you'll have the suffering," whispered Betty, with a compassionate glance toward Alice Guerin.

"See if you can't get your own room changed," urged Bobby. "The Bennett girls have the room next to yours, I know, but it's impossible to avoid any one in your unit. I wouldn't stand for it, Alice; make a fuss."

Alice shook her head.

"I wouldn't be so silly," she said crisply. "If Miss Lacey wasn't here to help with the room reservations, Mrs. Eustice and Miss Anderson must have had an awfully hard time. I'm not going to ask them to do one bit of shifting for me."

"Knock on the door, Betty," commanded Bobby. "If Ada has started on her grievances, she'll be in there all night."

Betty obediently knocked.

"Come in," called Mrs. Eustice, and the six girls entered the pleasant office.

Beneath her white hair, the dark eyes of the principal glowed a welcome.

"Why, Betty Gordon, I didn't know you were here!" she said cordially. "And the Guerins and the Littells—why, you nice girls to be so promptly on time!"

Miss Anderson, the physical instructor, who,

in the absence of Miss Lacey and until the new teacher should come to take her place, was keeping the room registration, smiled from her desk in the corner. She had spent the greater part of the summer with this group at the shore, and they were delighted to see her again.

With the lovely graciousness that was her chief charm, Mrs. Eustice managed to dismiss Ada, who was evidently greatly put out. She then asked after each girl's health and happiness and heard something of how the summer months had gone and received the messages Mrs. Guerin and Mrs. Littell had sent before turning them over to Miss Anderson to be registered as a fresh group came into the office.

"We're all so sorry to hear about Miss Lacey and Miss Sharpe," said Betty, blotting her name after she had signed and handing the pen to Louise.

"Miss Lacey hopes to come back next year, if her mother's health improves," Miss Anderson explained. "And you mustn't feel bad about Miss Sharpe—she is married and lives in California."

"Oh! Oh, Miss Anderson!" gasped Libbie, her eyes round with wonder and delight. "How perfectly lovely! And you never told us that, Bobby!" She turned accusingly on her cousin.

"Didn't know it," retorted Bobby briefly.

There was no hope of dragging Libbie away

without more details, so Miss Anderson obligingly supplied her with all the information she had at her disposal. Libbie, as Bobby said, looked as though she were attending the wedding herself, and when at last the teacher paused and said there was nothing more to be told, she sighed regretfully.

"Now, girls, one of the new teachers will be on your corridor in Miss Lacey's place," said Miss Anderson. "I want you to help make things go smoothly for her. There are a number of freshmen on the other side of the hall from you this year, and naturally they'll take their cue from you. I'm sorry I didn't know in time that Ada Nansen and Ruth Gladys Royal had set their hearts on Coralie Swan's room. I've assigned that to two rather self-effacing girls who can be easily bullied, I'm afraid."

"We'll be all right, Miss Anderson," Alice Guerin hastened to assure her. "Our rooms are the same as last year, and Norma and I and the Bennett girls didn't have any trouble with Ada, or she with us. Any one who can quarrel with Laura Bennett could pick an argument with Job."

"But at that, Ada is the most selfish person who ever breathed, and I don't care if I do say it," declared Norma, as the girls went down the cement walk, having decided to go part away around the lake. "Last year she never once put

the bathroom in order, and each of us is supposed to do her share, you know."

"Betty, do my eyes deceive me," begged Bobby nervously, "or is that Miss Prettyman approaching us?"

"You know it is," giggled Betty. "She isn't deceived, either. Why couldn't that man have married her instead of my darling Miss Sharpe who could make Latin a live thing?"

"You don't wish the man any hard luck, do you?" giped Bobby, but before she could say more Miss Prettyman reached them.

"How do you do?" she said formally. "I am glad to see that you have returned punctually. Those girls who wait till the last day cause needless work and delay, since the records can not be completed till the registrations are closed."

"Yes'm," chorused six respectful voices.

"Where are you going, may I ask?" continued the teacher, who was Mrs. Eustice's secretary and generally kept a strict eye on the deportment of the school at large.

"We thought we'd go down by the lake," Betty answered.

"I am sure you have all left your rooms in a state of untidiness," said Miss Prettyman. "I shall do the corridor work till Miss Lacey's successor comes to us and I must ask you to return and finish unpacking, so that the janitor and his

assistant can take the trunks down before dinner."

There was nothing to do but to go back to their rooms, though each rebelled at the thought of spending the rest of that perfect afternoon in such fashion. Miss Lacey, it seemed, had been nicer than they had thought; she was an extremely quiet woman and rarely interfered with her students until they stepped over the lines she laid down for them. Then she could act, and had acted, with force and decision, as Ada had learned to her cost.

"Has Dave McGuire got an assistant?" asked Betty an hour later, closing the lid of her empty trunk with a bang. "I thought George helped him with the trunks when he wasn't running the bus."

"Dave has a man to help him this year," Louise Littell volunteered. "A young chap, not over pleasant, though perhaps it isn't fair to give him a snap judgment. His name is John Towsky and he has already let it be known that he doesn't take any orders unless they come from Dave McGuire."

The full roster of the school was registered by the next day, Frances Martin arriving that same night and Constance Howard—who had to make the journey from San Francisco—coming early the following afternoon. There was much speculation about the two new teachers, but Mrs. Eustice

announced that they might be delayed several days and that she herself would take the Latin classes until the Misses Nevins arrived.

"That means Miss Prettyman will drive us mad until this new woman takes pity on us and comes," mourned Bobby.

"The new one may be worse," Norma Guerin retorted darkly, but Bobby said that her suggestion was an impossibility.

"Well, we can't waste any more time waiting for Miss What's-Her-Name to guide us in history and the path of conduct," announced Bobby, a night or two later. "The Mysterious Four are going to take in some of the freshies to-night and we're supposed to help."

Libbie groaned.

"Just my luck!" she complained. "Mrs. Eustice gave me a page of translation to do and hand to her before breakfast to-morrow—who told me she was an easy teacher?—and Miss Prettyman and I had an argument this afternoon and nothing will satisfy her but an essay on Charles the First, extra assignment."

"If it was only Miss Prettyman, you might let the work slide, Libbie," said Betty thoughtfully. "But Mrs. Eustice simply will not accept excuses; so it looks as though you'd have to stay."

"Oh, the translation is done," Libbie informed her blithely. "Timmie Derby did it for me—

that is, he's going to. Latin is as easy as English for Timothy. And I think I'll let Miss Prettyman wait for Charles the First—silly old chump he was, anyway."

"I don't know where you've had a chance to see Timothy," said Betty. "Anyway, if you think Mrs. Eustice can't tell his style of translation from yours, you're due for a jolt."

"Never mind where I saw Timothy!" retorted Libbie airily. "Come on, let's work up some awful stunts for the poor little freshies."

The Mysterious Four, of which Bobby had spoken, had elected Betty and Bobby and their six closest chums to membership the year before. The organization was in control of the seniors, and since the sophomores were generally taken under the wing of the upper class, leaving the juniors to protect the entering class, the second year girls had been selected to serve as assistants this evening.

"Girls, I'm to wear one of the hoods and veils!" announced Betty, with a shiver of delicious anticipation. "'Member how frightened we were last year?"

Tap! Tap! sounded at the door.

Constance Howard rose to open it and two senior girls came in.

"We've brought you your hood and veil, Betty," said Leila Grover. "The girls are in their

rooms waiting for you. Anna is going with you. The rest of us will go down to the study hall and get the commands shuffled in the basket. But, Betty——”

“Yes?” said Betty, her voice muffled by the veil which Louise was adjusting over her face.

“I forgot to get the key from Dave—the water tower key, you know. Will you ask him? You’ll have plenty of time after the notifications. We had such fun with the water tower last year that we thought we’d try the stunt again.”

“I’ll get the key,” promised Betty. “Though I hope the girl who picks that command from the basket will have a luckier time of it than I had,” she added.

For Betty’s initiation stunt the year before had been to visit this water tower alone at midnight. The “commands” were drawn by each candidate from a basket held by a senior student and were to be implicitly obeyed. Betty had gone through with her task, but not without more excitement than had been originally planned for her.

CHAPTER VI

INITIATION NIGHT

ANNA MAYNARD, the second senior, was to go with Betty, and the others went down to the large study hall where the initiations were to be held. In the corridor two other veiled figures joined Betty and Anna—a senior, Tracy Gray, and stout Dora Estabrooke, who was in Betty's class. These were the committee of the Mysterious Four who were to visit each freshman's room and command her attendance in the study hall.

They visited four rooms, leaving consternation and delight in their wake, then tapped at the door of the room occupied by the two girls who had "driven out" Ada Nansen and Ruth Gladys Royal from their coveted place; at least, so Ada asserted.

"Come—come in," said a voice, when Tracy Gray had knocked firmly.

"Freshmen, when we enter, rise," commanded Anna Maynard, and Betty felt again the thrill she had experienced a year ago when that order had been addressed to her.

The two girls who roomed together stood up. They were both plump, good-natured-looking and—alas for Mrs. Eustice's lectures on what to wear and what not to wear—both were garbed in kimonos and flopping slippers.

"Get dressed and go down to the study hall?" echoed the blue-eyed one, Edith Ames, weakly, when she heard what she was supposed to do. "Good gracious, do I have to get dressed and go downstairs again to-night?"

"You certainly do," Anna informed her briskly.

Edith's room-mate, Jessie Wood, reached for the candy box open on the table.

"I'm too tired to do another thing," she announced. "I was going to bed in another minute."

"If you're ill, we'll call the corridor teacher and take her report," Anna returned imperturbably. "Otherwise, you are to be in the study hall within five minutes."

"Don't call Miss Prettyman!" begged Jessie, in obvious panic. "She's been talking diet to me ever since I came to school—she and Miss Anderson. I won't diet; I like to eat and I intend to eat. I'll get dressed, honestly I will."

When all the freshmen had been visited the committee went down to the study hall, to find it buzzing with excitement. The candidates were huddled in the front rows of seats and the seniors

were busily writing out the last of the tasks to be performed as initiation stunts.

"I have to go get the water tower key," whispered Betty, handing her hood and veil to Bobby, who was guarding the door that opened on the stage. "I'll be back in time to see some of the fun."

"Wait a minute and I'll go with you," said Bobby. "Louise, you watch the door."

Norma Guerin volunteered to come too, and the three went down to the basement in search of Dave McGuire, the grizzled janitor.

The sound of a fire shovel scraped across the furnace room floor drew them in that direction. The heaters had not been lighted for the season, but the hot water boiler needed individual attention. A man was examining a gauge as the girls peeped in at the door.

"Where's Dave?" asked Betty cheerfully, thinking that it was George, the garageman. He and the janitor often traded favors.

The figure straightened and the black-browed, scowling face of John Towsky, the new assistant janitor, was raised to her.

"McGuire's gone to the movies," said Towsky surlily.

"Oh, well! May we have one of the keys to the water tower, please?" Betty asked. "We're going to use it in an initiation stunt."

Towsky frowned and shook his head.

"You'll get no key from me," he declared. "I'm not in the habit of handing out my keys to the students, to have 'em lost when they're needed."

His tone was disagreeable and his lounging attitude more so. Bobby spoke sharply.

"Dave always gives us the key—he did last year," she said. "We haven't any time to waste; let us have it at once."

The man muttered something in his native tongue. His English was without an accent, but guttural. Betty judged he had been born in this country, probably of foreign parents.

"You'll get no key from me," he retorted, folding his arms and leaning against one of the pipes.

Betty saw behind him a board covered with hooks. On each hook hung a key, neatly labeled with a tag. She recognized the key to the water tower, the counterpart of one Dave McGuire carried on his huge key-ring.

"I don't believe this man can read," she thought to herself, forcing her eyes to leave the board, lest his attention be drawn to it. "Or else he hasn't been here long enough to know where Dave keeps his spare keys. I wonder if I could get that key off the board?"

Fortune favored her to a certain extent, and she

made up the distance remaining to her goal with a dash of daring—a Betty-method of getting out of difficulties. Norma and Bobby turned to go upstairs and Towsky moved toward the door, too, having evidently finished his work at the boiler.

Betty ran noiselessly to the 'board, unhooked the key, and turned triumphantly to face the livid assistant janitor. At that same moment the massive shoulders and grizzled head of Dave McGuire were thrust into the small room.

"You give that to me! You stole it!" Towsky shouted hoarsely.

"None of that," growled Dave. "None of that! What's the trouble, Miss Betty?"

"We wanted the water tower key," Betty panted, clutching it tightly. "It's initiation night, Dave, and we had to have it. He wouldn't let us have it, so I took it. You don't care, do you?"

The janitor's silent laugh shook his heavy frame.

"Who am I, to put my weak will against that of the likes of you?" he replied cheerfully. "I minded it was the night for your stunts and came back to tell John, here, about the keys. He didn't know they're the extra ones. For all he knew, I had 'em all with me and if he'd told you that, he would have told the truth as far as he knew it."

The younger man darted a black look at Betty, which did not escape the notice of his superior.

"Did he say aught to you that was out of place?" Dave asked quickly. "Was he fresh, Miss Betty? 'Tis myself will be only too happy to teach him the manners, if he's lacking 'em."

Bobby and Norma, from the doorway, would have spoken, but Betty stopped them with a glance of warning.

"Oh, no," she said hurriedly. "He—he didn't understand, I guess. That's all. I'm awfully glad to get the key, and we'll return it to you positively by to-morrow morning."

"And at that, I'll warrant you got off easy, me lad," grumbled McGuire to his assistant, as the girls ran upstairs to the study hall. "Miss Betty's no hand for telling tales, but you've got a tongue in your head and a disposition that's going to land you in trouble some day."

The initiations proceeded smoothly, the girls enjoying the absurd "stunts" until, after ice-cream and cake, they scattered to their rooms, to carry out the "sealed orders," as the slips drawn from the basket on the darkened platform were designated. When Betty and her chums had joined the society, this second degree had been saved for another meeting, but the officers had decided to combine the two in one this term. This was partly because the absence of the two teachers

was causing lightened class work which would have to be made up later in the term.

Betty had taken no part in writing the sealed orders, described as "tests of character," and when she heard bursts of laughter coming from the room of Jessie Wood and Edith Ames, she judged that they had drawn commands which pleased them.

She was surprised a few minutes later to hear a tap at her door. Bobby was still in the study hall and Betty was alone, a circumstance in itself rare. Her uncle had once declared that she seemed perpetually surrounded by girls.

"Oh, Miss Gordon," fluttered Edith Ames, stepping over the sill, "I want to ask you if you'll lend me your locker keys. Like a perfect idiot, I left mine in the gym balcony, and I can't get them till the janitor unlocks the building tomorrow."

"Of course you may have my keys," Betty answered promptly. "But there is nothing in the locker—not a thing."

The lockers were in the basement and could be used without going into the main gymnasium building.

"I thought you kept your canoe paddles in it," said Edith disappointedly.

"Canoe paddles!" repeated Betty. "What on

earth do you want with paddles at this time of night?"

"Well, of course it's a secret, but if you must know I don't suppose there is any harm in telling; you're a sophomore," Edith rattled on, being one of those girls who can never make her meaning clear in a few words. "There, read that. It's my sealed order!"

She gave Betty a slip of paper on which was scrawled: "Paddle across the lake and place a Shadyside banner on top of the Salsette iron gates."

"You can't do anything like that," Betty said slowly. "It's against all the school rules. We can't go out after dark, much less when it's nearly eleven o'clock. And you can't cross the lake after six, let alone play silly tricks like this that reflect on the school."

"I was ordered to do it, and I'm going to," said Edith, her weak chin set obstinately. "I won't fall down on my first initiation."

Betty glanced at the paper again. She hoped Libbie had not written it. No matter, if she had. With sudden determination she tore the slip across and tossed the pieces into her wastebasket.

"Don't be silly," she advised Edith tersely.

CHAPTER VII

TWO NEW TEACHERS

"WELL, thanks be, that's over!" announced Bobby, bursting through the door in her usual impetuous fashion.

"Huh? What is it?" she asked, with a startling change of tone.

Edith Ames stood in the center of the floor, wearing a light coat and trailing a scarf on the floor. Betty faced her, and it was Betty's expression that surprised Bobby.

"She looked like a—like—a—well, like Mrs. Eustice does when she's laying down the law," Bobby explained to Louise the next day.

"Bobby, you go and tell Leila Grover to come here," said Betty coldly.

"It's late; won't to-morrow do?" Bobby suggested.

"Go and get her now," was Betty's reply to this, and the amazed Bobby hurried off in search of the senior class president.

Leila came back with her in a few minutes,

and Betty and Edith were standing in the same positions when Bobby saw them again.

"Miss Prettyman is having fits, Betty," Leila announced. "Lights are going off in ten minutes. Did you send for me?"

"Edith is also having a fit," announced Betty calmly. "I tore up her initiation slip, and she's peeved. Her instructions were to paddle across the lake and place a Shadyside banner on top of the Salsette iron gates."

Leila's lips closed in a firm line.

"Let me have the pieces, if there are any left," she commanded. "I hope, Edith, you don't think the Mysterious Four would stand for any such foolishness as that. Here, I'll write you out another slip. Lend me your fountain pen a moment, Betty."

She hurriedly scribbled across a sheet of paper, tore it across, folded it and gave it to Edith.

"What was your roommate to do?" Leila asked suspiciously. "Perhaps I ought to go round and see if any more such slips were distributed," and she looked uncertainly at Betty.

"Jessie's slip was easy," volunteered Edith. "She had to go to bed at once."

Bobby giggled, and just then the lights went out.

"Libbie had that order last year," snickered Bobby. "She was too mad to speak."

Edith pattered off, clutching her new slip, but Leila lingered.

"Betty," she whispered, confident that Miss Prettyman was somewhere near and likely to interrupt them at any moment, "I know who wrote that silly slip. It was Ada Nansen. I asked her to do one for Edith Ames, because none of the girls knew her very well and I thought Ada was friendly with her. She must have known better than to do a thing like that."

Bobby snorted. Luckily Miss Prettyman did not hear her.

"Know better?" she scoffed. "Ada knows less the longer she stays here."

"Well," said Leila doubtfully, opening the door softly, "I'll never be able to thank you enough, Betty. If that crazy girl had paddled across the lake at this time of night, the Academy watchman would have caught her and there would have been a beautiful scrape. Mrs. Eustice holds the seniors responsible for everything the Mysterious Four does. The wildest order we ever give is that one for the water tower. You had it last year and Mary Morris has it to-night."

"Allow me to remind you that it is now half-past eleven," the clear, cold voice of Miss Prettyman broke in. "Leila Grover, you know as well as I do that the privilege of lights till eleven was a special concession, and to abuse it—"

"I'm going," said Leila hastily. "I'm going this minute, Miss Prettyman. Good-night, Betty and Bobby. If I hear a crash you'll know I've missed my footing and fallen downstairs in the dark."

Betty and Bobby undressed in silence, each busy with her own thoughts.

"Say, Betty," whispered Bobby, after they were both in bed, "do you know what I think? I'll bet Ada Nansen tried to get Edith in wrong. She's still as mad as hops that she and Ruth couldn't have that room, and she blames Edith. She pretends to be friends with her, but she's just waiting a chance to give her a dig."

"Uh-huh," yawned Betty sleepily, but she herself had had a similar thought.

A couple of mornings after the initiation a ripple of excitement went through the dining-room as the girls assembled for breakfast. Betty and her chums occupied a table together, as they had during their first term, and it was Constance Howard who brought them the "news."

"Don't look now," she said, as she slipped into her place opposite Louise; "but by and by take a peep at the teachers' tables. The new teachers are there!"

The teachers sat by themselves at four tables grouped near the windows on one side of the room. The girls took elaborate pains not to

stare, but during the meal one by one they managed to glance over at the strangers.

"Don't say a word," commanded Betty hurriedly, as Bobby seemed to be bursting with the desire for speech. "For pity's sake, keep still till we go out. Louise, have you done that translation?"

But if Betty acted kindly, others were not so considerate. Gradually a buzz rose in the room, and it was easy to guess what the subject of the quickened conversation was. The two new teachers seated at the table with Mrs. Eustace were not like any women who had taught, or were teaching, at Shadyside.

"How awful looking they are!" exclaimed Bobby, when at last she was free to speak.

They were up in their rooms, collecting their books for the first recitation which would follow immediately after morning assembly.

"Why, one of them is all scarred!" Libbie's voice rose shrilly. "Betty, did you see her face and hands?"

"Yes, I saw them," answered Betty. "Come on, or we'll be late."

"I'd hate to be scarred like that," Libbie insisted, giving a satisfied glance at her own peachy skin as she passed a glass in the corridor.

"Well, Miss Nevins probably isn't rejoicing

over her looks," remarked Bobby rather sarcastically.

"Is that her name?" asked Ada Nansen, coming out of her room, her books under her arm.

"The one with all the scars is Miss Harriet Nevins and the other is named Martha," Bobby explained. "They're sisters. Miss Harriet takes Miss Sharpe's place and Miss Martha substitutes for Miss Lacey."

"Thank goodness we don't have to have a face like that for our corridor teacher," said Ada frankly. "Though I must say Miss Martha is no beauty. Did you ever see such clothes as they both wear? They look as though they'd shut their eyes and pulled something out of the missionary barrel and put it on."

Practically all the talk of the girls gathering for assembly was of the two new teachers. Little of the conversation was complimentary. The Nevins sisters were undeniably plain, and the scarred face of Miss Harriet was drawn into deep lines that gave her a curiously doleful expression. They had pale eyes, sand-colored hair, brushed back into tidy, unfashionable knots, and their clothes, while neat, were, in their way, as sad and hopeless as the wearers.

"Where did Mrs. Eustice get any one like that?" puzzled Ada, chewing a nougat thoughtfully as she waited for Ruth Royal to write her

a list of French verbs. Ada and Ruth were forever helping each other and, odd to say, neither was ever known to be fully prepared for any recitation.

"Oh, Mrs. Eustice gets queer ideas sometimes," Ruth replied carelessly. "I suppose they're sharks about teaching. History and Latin are enough to make any one queer. I'm glad we won't have to recite to Mrs. Eustice. She marks you as though she thought you ought to spend all your study time on her one subject."

When the girls met Miss Harriet Nevins in the Latin class—for Betty and her chums this followed directly after assembly—they found little reason to alter their first impressions. The teacher was pleasant, but not magnetic. Perhaps the consciousness of her terribly scarred face and hands prevented her from displaying a more cordial manner. She seemed a little stiff—"stand-offish," the girls called it—and while she was patience itself with bunglers, she made no comment on an especially brilliant translation given by Louise, who was the student of the Littell family. Miss Sharpe would have praised and upbraided and rallied her girls twenty times in the course of a forty-five minute recitation.

"Just plain queer," was the verdict of the changing Latin classes, and the judgment filtered

through the school as school girl verdicts always do.

"Her sister can't be any worse than Miss Prettyman for corridor teacher," Bobby declared soberly, as they left the Latin class for an English recitation.

Miss Martha Nevins, the Shadyside girls decided, after reciting to her in history, might be an excellent corridor teacher, but her personality was almost as colorless as that of Miss Harriet. To be sure, she was a trifle more animated and she reproved Ada sharply for covert whispering, but, as Bobby complained, she apparently looked upon her pupils as so many empty jugs to be filled with a puree of facts and dates.

"She keeps pouring 'em in," complained Bobby, "and I feel that it's only the ringing of the bell that prevents her from drowning us. She doesn't stop to ask if we're soaking up her streams of knowledge, or if it's merely running out of us through the cracks."

"Betty, you can't deny she is queer, can you?" demanded Libbie. "She hasn't a romantic vein—not one!"

"I never was crazy about romantic people myself," Bobby asserted. She never lost a chance to snub Libbie; for her own good, she was careful to explain.

"Betty, both of them are queer—why won't

you admit it?" Norma Guerin said a week later. "I don't want to be horrid, but I never saw too less attractive teachers in my life! Even the girl who teaches the grade school at home has more charm, and I don't suppose she is half so well educated."

Betty looked troubled.

"I don't think it's fair to talk as we do," she protested slowly. "What do we know about Miss Harriet or Miss Martha? Little enough—a few recitations with them, a week or two with Miss Martha as corridor teacher. They are new to our ways, and it can't be very easy to have to make the acquaintance of one hundred and sixty girls at once. Let's wait a little while and play fair."

"That's what you learn from your Uncle Dick," said Bobby shrewdly, but she criticised the two new teachers a little more gently after that.

"Extra!" shouted Bobby, a few weeks after this, bursting in upon a "mending meeting" held in the Guerins' room. Bobby never had any clothes to mend herself; she handed them over to Louise.

"Extra!" she cried again. "All about the tragedy that's going to happen! Extra!"

CHAPTER VIII

"WHEN THE CAT'S AWAY"

ALICE GUERIN looked up from a bit of exquisite sewing. Alice loved needlework.

"You're the greatest girl, Bobby, to get hold of news," she observed. "I never saw your equal. What have you discovered now?"

"Keep off the bed," warned Norma. "Oh, Bobby, please!"

"I'll spread it up again all nice and smooth," Bobby promised, curling herself up at the foot of Norma's bed and smiling her disarming grin. "Honest, Norma, I have to be comfortable."

"Well, go ahead and give us the news," said Norma resignedly. "What happened?"

"Nothing yet. But wait!" Bobby whispered mysteriously. "Wait and see!"

Seven girls reached for seven articles of sufficiently light weight to hurl easily. Bobby saw the concerted action.

"I'll tell," she surrendered. "Put that pillow down, Betty. I'll tell everything I know. Mrs. Eustice is going away!"

"Not so good," remarked the slangy Constance.

"Miss Prettyman is going with her!"

"Add that to my list of Thanksgiving blessings," commented Louise with a wave of her needle.

Betty had been watching Bobby's face.

"What are you holding back?" she demanded sternly. "Out with it all, Bobby."

"You'd make a good detective," grumbled her chum. "Well, if you must know, Miss Martha Nevins is going to be in charge."

"In charge?" echoed Libbie. "In charge of what?"

"The school, goosie," Bobby retorted. "And if any one wants my opinion, they may have it in three words: It's a mistake. Miss Martha isn't capable of handling the school. The girls will walk all over her."

"Bobby, I don't think you have a right to say that," Betty said a little indignantly. "Don't you suppose Mrs. Eustice trusts us to behave ourselves in her absence? If you feel like walking over any one, just confine your efforts to Tommy Tucker—he'll stand for it."

Bobby put out her tongue, but she said no more about the ability of Miss Martha Nevins to direct the affairs of the school. Instead, she answered the questions of the girls who were

curious about the source of her information. Bobby's revelations usually proved to be correct, but how and when and where she learned the facts she distributed was a never-ending mystery.

"Miss Anderson told me," she announced now. "I had to go down to the gym to explain my absence from gym class this morning. Madame held me over a class, you know, to tell me my French when I am impudent is better than when I'm using polite conversation—"

"Were you impudent?" asked Libbie, round-eyed.

"No, just 'fresh,' " Bobby answered cheerfully. "Well, of course I had to placate Miss Anderson, and she set me pulling weights for fifteen minutes and then her conscience smote her and she became confidential and told me about Mrs. Eustice. She has to be gone several weeks, I believe. Some business in New York."

"I don't suppose you have any more news?" Constance Howard suggested.

Bobby nodded, enjoying the attention immediately centered on her.

"Ada Nansen," she declared, kicking her heels on Norma's counterpane with true Bobby-recklessness, "and Ruth Gladys Royal have to study the rest of this week in the study hall. That's what they get for interfering with the two little

freshmen—what are their names? Edith Ames is one."

"She rooms with Jessie Wood," Betty said. "What did Ada do to them?"

"Oh, had them in her room during study hours and talked so much no one could get any studying done," Bobby returned. "Miss Martha put the blame on the sophomores and sent them to the hall; but unless Edith and Jessie get better reports next week they'll have to go down, too."

"Do you know what I think?" said Libbie seriously. "I think Miss Martha has heard something about being easy—I mean something the girls have said—and if we don't look out she'll go the other way and be too strict for words. Miss Harriet is giving out more outside work than Miss Sharpe ever did so early in the term."

The next day Bobby's advance report was confirmed by Mrs. Eustice herself in morning assembly. In a brief speech the principal told the girls that important business had called her to New York, that Miss Prettyman was accompanying her, and that Miss Martha Nevins would be in charge of the school till her return.

"I expect to be gone two weeks, not longer," Mrs. Eustice announced. "I trust to your spirit of friendship and coöperation to help Miss Nevins in every way. The normal schedules are

to be rigidly followed, and I expect to have excellent reports of you when I return."

"I never heard of anything so crazy in my life!" scolded Ada Nansen, as the girls filed out of the assembly room. "Why does Mrs. Eustice pick on a woman like that to have charge of the school? I won't stand for it, that's all there is to it! Mrs. Eustice must be losing her mind."

"My goodness, you can get worked up over anything, can't you?" Bobby said curiously. "What difference does it make who is in charge?"

"Why, we want a woman with a presence," explained Ada, waving her hands as she talked—Bobby detested mannerisms of any kind. "Shady-side is a cultured school, and we're used to having teachers with dignity and character. And I'd be ashamed to have any of the Academy boys come over and see Miss Martha in that brown dress she wears. Our cook looks better than she does."

"I think the less Ada Nansen says about presence and character the better," Bobby declared, reporting the conversation to Betty during the French class. "She always reminds me of something that has been veneered and shows the real shoddiness through the cracks. She can't do one thing I honestly admire."

"Yes, she can," flashed Betty. "She can sing. Have you heard her this term? She practiced

this summer, and, Bobby, her voice is the loveliest thing you ever heard."

"Well, that's a gift; she isn't responsible for it," Bobby insisted, unwilling to concede anything in Ada's favor.

Mrs. Eustice and Miss Prettyman left on a morning train, serenely unaware of the seething discontent they left behind them. Unfortunately, neither of the new teachers possessed a forcible personality and, what was worse, they seemed to lack confidence in themselves. Miss Harriet, especially sensitive about her appearance, made no move to gain the good-will of the girls. She was an excellent teacher, but her discipline was not firm and she instinctively seemed anxious to avoid any clash. She would resolutely hold Libbie to a specified amount of outside work, keeping her an hour after class if necessary, but only a heightened color answered Ada's deliberate ignoring of her rules.

"As long as you do your work you can get away with murder," Libbie complained. "I've a good mind to let Timmie do all my work for me and concentrate on vaudeville stunts like Ada and Ruth to while away the Latin period.

"You let me catch you copying them!" warned Bobby. "As it is I should think you'd be ashamed to have Timothy Derby do your lessons for you."

"Latin is all he does," Libbie answered calmly. "He says it's good practice for him."

"What I want to know," fumed Bobby, "is how does she get the papers over to Timothy and back again?"

"I don't know. But she'll tell us some day if we don't ask," Betty replied confidently. "Frances ought to help her now and then and she wouldn't get discouraged and ask Timmie to do her stuff."

Miss Martha Nevins, her plain, kind face more wearily lined than ever, did her best to see that everything went smoothly. She had the loyal support of the teaching faculty and of the servants, for she was courteous and considerate of all with whom she came in contact. It did seem that fate was unnecessarily trying when Aunt Nancy, the head cook, came to report that she had to go South to see her daughter at once.

"That girl sent for me, and I just got to go," Aunt Nancy declared. "I sure am sorry to leave you like this, Miss Martha, but I'll send you a friend to take my place till I get back. Yes'm, Judy will do fine and you won't miss me t'all. I'm a mother, and us mothers can't hear our children calling in vain."

"Shucks!" was Miss Anderson's comment on this touching sentiment. "Aunt Nancy sees a chance to go make a visit while Mrs. Eustice is away, and she is making the most of it. There's

nothing the matter with her daughter—she spent the summer with her. Mrs. Eustice holds her strictly to her contract, and you're foolish if you don't do the same."

"I could never forgive myself if I kept her here and her daughter needed her," said Miss Martha solemnly. "Besides, she is sending me a woman to take her place. Judy, I think she called her."

"I hope she can cook," Miss Anderson sighed. "I have misgivings. Good cooks are seldom to be had with so little trouble."

Miss Anderson's doubts proved well founded. Aunt Nancy left and in her stead arrived a tall, raw-boned colored woman who was, she informed Miss Martha, suffering with a "lil neuritis in mah arm." She suffered a different ailment with the dawn of each new day and her face was perpetually bound up in a piece of red flannel, a decoration that made her far from prepossessing to behold.

Judy may have been able to cook when she felt well, but, if so, her physical troubles had a dreadful effect on her culinary skill.

"I just don't seem to take no interest in getting up meals no more," she told one of the waitresses. "I been on a diet so long I don't care if I never eat again."

"But we care," stormed Bobby, who heard this.

"We haven't the lumbago and the misery and neuritis and rheumatism."

"We've had boiled potatoes every night and for lunch for three days," Libbie complained. "Doesn't she know any other way to cook them?"

"Don't be so fussy," Betty said good-humoredly. "If you'd lived out in the oil fields, as I have, you wouldn't be so ready to find fault with your meals. The men out there live on canned beans the year round, I think. I know they're a staple article of diet."

But even Betty could not honestly excuse the quality and the quantity of the food that followed the introduction of Judy into the school kitchen. The meals grew worse daily. Miss Anderson, investigating, found that Miss Martha was allowing Judy to do the marketing, and she suspected that the cook was putting much of the market money into her own pocket.

"But Miss Martha won't hurt her feelings by such an accusation," Miss Anderson told Betty, to whom she sometimes spoke confidentially, sure that what she asked to be kept secret would not be repeated to one other girl.

"I'm going to start something and start it now!" Ada Nansen exclaimed angrily, after a meager dinner.

CHAPTER IX

ADA'S PETITION

"DID you hear what Ada said?" whispered Bobby, as the girls left the dining-room. "I don't know that I blame her. I never in all my life sat down to a meal like that. Some one ought to write to Mrs. Eustice."

Betty shook her head.

"Oh, come now, Betty, you needn't tell me you approve of the way things are being run!" Bobby protested, as she toiled upstairs after her chum. "Nothing fit to eat and lessons being piled onto us till it's a wonder we don't come down with brain fever."

Betty opened the door of their room and laughed as she snapped on the table light.

"You won't get brain fever, Bobby," she said affectionately. "I'm not worrying about that."

"Well, if you're such a stickler for fairness, answer me this," Bobby flung at her. "Do you think it's fair to stop Friday night dancing in the gym because so many have flunked in history and Latin?"

"No, I don't think it's fair at all," answered Betty promptly. "I think it is a perfect shame. But, Bobby, can't you see that the reason Miss Martha and Miss Harriet are piling lessons on us is because that's the one way they care to discipline us? Every one is doing exactly as she pleases. Ada went to Edentown to-day and never asked permission, and Ruth Royal has had three boxes from home in one week, and two a month is the limit."

"And you cut gym class and went to the football game," Bobby inserted neatly.

"Well, if I did," said Betty, blushing but honestly, "I paid for it. Bob brought me home the minute the game was over and read me a lecture all the way across the lake on how to behave in Mrs. Eustice's absence. He said that when she was here I could go as far as I liked and take the consequences. But he wasn't going to stand for any funny work when we were left on our honor. I felt about as big as a dried pea when he finished with me."

"The boys seem to know a lot about what is going on over here," Bobby commented. "Tommy told me that what we needed was a colonel with an iron glove on one hand and a carpet beater in the other."

"Miss Anderson doesn't feel the need of an iron glove," said Betty. "She gave me an extra

fifteen minutes of gym for the rest of the week. I don't see why Mrs. Eustice didn't leave Miss Anderson in charge of the school. She's a dear, but she doesn't let any one walk on her."

"Maybe she wouldn't take the responsibility," Bobby hazarded shrewdly.

"What a racket there is in the corridor," said Betty, pulling a book toward her and opening it at the next day's lesson. "Stick your head out, like a good child, Bobby, and see if you see any excitement."

Bobby immediately peered into the corridor.

"Regular parade," she reported. "All going into Ada's room. Ada has plenty of nerve, hasn't she? Miss Martha sent her and Ruth to the study hall to do their work."

"I wonder what that girl is up to," Betty speculated. "I think we ought to listen in, Bobby. What do you say?"

"I say I couldn't begin to finish up one-half the advance translation Miss Harriet gave us to-day, so why even start?" said Bobby, gazing disconsolately at her pile of books. "Let's go and hear the good word. There go Edith Ames and Jessie Wood."

"Libbie isn't in her room, so she must be there, too," Betty declared, after a glance into Libbie's room had shown her Frances Martin studying

in solitary bliss. "Hurry up, Frances—we're going calling."

Frances joined them, rather reluctantly, and they gathered up Norma and Alice Guerin and Louise and Constance on their way down to Ada's room, which was near the head of the stairs.

"Ada should have rented the study hall," snickered Bobby, as they wedged themselves inside the door of the already overcrowded room.

Ada and Ruth Gladys sat at the table and girls filled every other inch of available space. They perched in the window seat and on the bed and on Ada's dresser. Betty and her chums stood for the simple reason that every chair was occupied and most of the floor space was taken by early comers who had seated themselves more or less comfortably in uneven rows.

"We're not going to endure this situation any longer," Ada said defiantly, addressing herself directly to Betty as soon as she saw her.

"What situation, Ada?" Betty asked quietly.

"I don't think we ought to put up with Miss Martha Nevins any longer," said Ada earnestly. "It shows we're weak and haven't any backbone. She's killing us with lessons and there hasn't been a decent meal for a week and the school is simply going to ruin."

"What are you going to do about it?" struck in Bobby belligerently.

"Ask for her removal," Ada announced impressively. "Ruth wrote out a petition, and it's all ready to sign."

"But what will you do with a petition?" asked Betty. "You can't present it to Mrs. Eustice till she comes back and then it will be useless; she will be in charge herself."

Ada set her pretty lips in a straight line.

"I'm going to present this petition where it will do some good," she said. "I'm going to hand it to Miss Martha as soon as it is signed. Then she'll know how we feel about her."

Into Betty's dark eyes leaped a sudden spark. Her cheeks flushed scarlet.

"Ada!" she cried, her voice low and trembling with anger. "You wouldn't dare!"

Ruth Gladys Royal mistook the trembling for timidity. She laughed.

"Ada isn't afraid of Miss Martha," she said confidently.

"Afraid of Miss Martha!" repeated Betty scornfully. "Perhaps not. But I should think, Ada Nansen, you'd be afraid to do a thing like that to a woman whose worst fault is that she is too gentle! It wouldn't be so bad—though I think it's outrageous any way you look at it—if Miss Martha could fight back. But she won't.

You'll hurt her pride, and she'll never get over it. At least have the decency to wait till Mrs. Eustice comes back, can't you?"

"I don't think we're to blame if Miss Martha and Miss Harriet haven't the power to compel our respect," said Dora Estabrooke mildly.

"If you send that petition, Ada," declared Betty seriously, "you'll always regret it. You can't be so cruel and so heartless and not be sorry afterward."

"Anyway, I don't believe the girls will be chumps enough to sign it," Norma Guerin observed.

"Oh, won't they?" retorted Ada. "Libbie Littell said she would—didn't you, Libbie?"

Bobby turned on her cousin in a blaze of wrath.

"If I hear of you putting your name on a paper like that—" she threatened.

"I guess I can do as I please," interrupted Libbie weakly.

"You promised," Ada reminded her. "You can't go back on your promise. And Edith Ames and Jessie Wood, and you, too, Dora. I've got a pen right here."

She named a dozen other girls, all lacking in what Bobby called "pep" and all without definite opinions of their own. With a feeling of hopelessness Betty realized that Ada had never lacked followers among these girls, and now she was

capitalizing their allegiance. She was a leader of the weak and the vague, but their names on a petition would be as imposing as the names of girls with fine principles and high ideals.

"If you sign that paper, Libbie," Bobby sputtered, "not one more cent do you get from me this term. I mean it! You ought to be ashamed of yourself! How long have you been a friend of Ada Nansen's?"

Libbie was always in debt. She spent her allowance weeks in advance, and she depended on the generosity of her chums to keep her in cash. Mrs. Eustice flatly refused to pay an allowance one day before it was due.

"I'll lend you as much as you want, Libbie," said Ada.

Libbie's unhappy glance wandered to Betty. Edith Ames, at the table, was signing her name to the petition.

"Oh, my dear!" said Betty softly.

"I won't sign it. I've changed my mind," Libbie announced boldly.

"Well, of course that is your privilege," murmured Ada, an unpleasant edge to her tone. "But I know a number of things that will interest Mrs. Eustice when she returns——"

Libbie looked frightened. She reached out her hand for the pearl and gold pen.

"After that you can't sign it," said Betty

sternly. "I don't know what Ada is talking about, but I understand blackmailing when I hear it. Mrs. Eustice will be home in a week, and I think the sensible thing to do is to wait. A week won't make much difference, Ada."

Some of the girls murmured eagerly. They did not want to be "mean" and they thought they could stand one more week without fainting from starvation or dropping from mental exhaustion. Those who had already signed the paper joined in this view of the situation, and Ada finally consented to a delay.

"I'll wait a week, and then, if Mrs. Eustice isn't back, nothing can stop me," she declared. "I think the truth is, you're afraid. Betty Gordon has made you think something will happen. I detest people who are afraid to stick to their word."

Libbie escaped to her own room ahead of the rest and was studying fast and furiously when Frances found her. If she thought that Betty would follow and ask her questions, Libbie was doomed to disappointment. Betty left her severely alone for the study hour and did not refer to Ada's insinuations when they met at breakfast the next morning.

CHAPTER X

POOR MISS HARRIET

TRUE to her word, Ada waited for a week, a long week in which the food grew poorer in quality and, if possible, less in quantity. Betty's Uncle Dick had sent her a box of good things, and Ada remarked that any one could counsel patience with half a dozen jars of jam stored away, not to mention cookies and a pound cake.

"You make me so tired, Ada Nansen," scolded Bobby. "Betty made that box go as far as possible. Every girl in our corridor got some of it. I know she gave you and Ruth a box of the cookies. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"I hate cocoanut cookies," flared Ada, whose nerves were decidedly "edgy."

"I'm going to give that petition to Miss Martha to-morrow," she added. "I have twenty names signed to it."

Bobby looked scornful.

"You'll never hear the end of it, if you do," she said. "Half the words are misspelled and a kindergarten child could have written it better."

So saying, she dashed into her room and banged the door after her, to relieve her feelings. Betty, searching for a tie in her bureau, reproached her mutely.

"You needn't look at me like that, Betty Gordon," Bobby declared hardily. "I've had a run-in with Ada again. But I'll bet I've made her pause. I told her that petition would make any one laugh—the spelling and the writing, I mean."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Betty curiously. "I never examined it."

"Well, neither have I," Bobby admitted. "But I took a chance. If Ruth Gladys Royal wrote it, I *know* half the words are misspelled."

Betty laughed as she slipped a golden brown tie through the collar of her pongee blouse and noted the effect with pleasure.

"Where did you pick up that trick?" she inquired interestedly.

"Tommy Tucker," Bobby returned. "He's always taking chances, and about one third of them come out right. If he can have a 'hunch,' so can I."

Bobby's "hunch" in Ada's case was remarkably effective. Ada had a horror of ridicule and she distrusted Ruth's ability to spell, as well she might. So she tore up the petition and set about making new plans.

Betty, hurrying to a recitation the next day,

stumbled over a figure seated in a shadowy corner.

"Miss Harriet!" cried Betty, in amazement. "Did I hurt you?"

She never forgot the eyes that were raised to hers—faded blue eyes with hurt and shame and something like panic lying heavy in them.

"No, no, of course you didn't hurt me, Betty," the teacher answered a little wildly. "I—I just sat down to rest. I think I was tired."

Betty stared, wishing she could think of something tactful to say.

"Betty, listen to me!" Miss Harriet said, with sudden energy. "Do you think this dress is the most horrible thing you ever saw? Would you be ashamed to have your cook look as I do?"

Over Betty's expressive face swept a great wave of color. Poor Miss Harriet! What had she heard?

"Oh, you needn't answer," the teacher said bitterly. "You needn't say a word. I understand. Probably there isn't a girl in this school who doesn't shrink from me—from my scarred face and my plain dress. We were never anything but homely, Martha and I, but we were never in such cruel contrast before—with young and lovely girls all about us and their standards of dress and leisure and wealth. We made a mistake in coming. But what could we do?"

"Please!" begged Betty, "please, Miss Har-

riety, don't feel like that. If some of the girls have been unkind——"

"You'll be late for recitation," Miss Harriet interrupted coldly. "Run along, Betty. I'm nervous this morning and don't mean what I'm saying at all."

Betty obediently went on, was late for French and drew down upon her the wrath of Madame, whose quick temper was already sorely tried by the events of the last two weeks.

"You sit there and dream, Betty Gordon," the excitable French woman stormed, for Betty, truth to tell, was thinking more of her encounter with Miss Harriet in the hall than of Madame's reproof.

"You sit there and dream," said Madame again, raising her voice. "I ask you to listen to me! I will not have my class interrupted! I tell you, I will not. You may take your books and to the study hall go, and your mark this period will be nothings!"

"That's not fair," said Betty to herself, gathering up her books and making her way to the study hall. "Mrs. Eustice hates that way of punishing, too. Madame never even asked me what made me late. Oh, dear, this whole school is going crazy. I wish Mrs. Eustice would come back."

Miss Anderson was in charge of the study hall

and she merely raised her eyebrows disapprovingly as Betty slipped into a vacant seat.

"She's cross, too," Betty thought gloomily. "If I don't see Bob this afternoon, I'll have the blues. He has the kind of temper I can understand—when he's mad, it's because there is something to be mad about. Temperament," she informed herself vigorously, flipping open a French grammar and glaring at the letters that danced before her eyes, "is my idea of nothing at all to be proud of."

When the corrior bells rang for the change of classes, Betty went to Miss Martha's room for her history lesson. Very sad and discouraged and extremely plain Miss Martha looked, and her dress did nothing to make her more attractive. Both she and her sister seemed to possess a fatal gift for selecting the wrong colors and lines, and a small town dressmaker had evidently done her best to contribute to the sorry whole. Betty began to plan to "make over" Miss Martha, and she was at work upon a hat for her when she saw Bobby signaling to her frantically.

"Are you prepared, or are you not?" came the clear, cold tones of Miss Martha's voice.

Betty tumbled her brown and blue velvet and the hackle feather trimming out of her mind, but unfortunately nothing took its place. She had not the slightest idea of how far the history recitation

had progressed. There was nothing to do but take refuge in failure.

"I'm not prepared," she said curtly.

Miss Martha's lips tightened. In a few crisp words she imposed a penalty that was far stiffer than even her usual exacting requirements and which was patently "unfair," judged by the school traditions and rules. A little murmur ran through the room and Ada Nansen flung a triumphant glance at Betty.

"Now are you satisfied?" she whispered. "I hope you'll get enough of playing patient martyr soon."

Betty was smarting under a sense of injustice, but she kept still, accepting the sympathy of her chums at luncheon—which followed the history period—without expressing any definite opinion. Not that she was "resigned to fate," as Libbie delicately hinted, but her thoughts went past the episode of the morning and recalled the tired faces of the two sisters as she had seen them at the chapel services the Sunday before. Gray and drab and utterly discouraged—that look came back to Betty now.

The afternoon promised a break, for it was a day when, after a forty-five minute period in the gymnasium, the girls were free till dinner time. They were encouraged to spend this free time

out of doors, and usually the lake and the grounds of the school were the attractions.

Betty had to give an extra fifteen minutes of weight pulling after gymnasium class as part penalty for her attendance at the football game, and she found herself in the locker room alone when she was ready to change her shoes.

"I knew we could count on you, John," said a voice so close that she jumped.

The open window, high above her head, told her the source of the sound. Some one was standing just outside on the ground, for the locker room was in the basement. Betty could see two shadows dimly reflected on the fire-glassed window which was tilted for the sake of ventilation.

"You can count on me, Miss," replied another voice, the assistant janitor's, Betty recognized at once. "I know what is right and what is not right."

"Well, we'll need help, John," the first voice returned briskly. That was Ada Nansen, Betty decided after a moment's thought. "We can't count on Dave at all; he's getting old and you can't argue with people who are elderly."

"That's true, Miss," Towsky returned eagerly. "Just what I've been saying to myself about McGuire. He's set in his ways. To hear him talk, you'd think the school would go to ruin

if every ash wasn't cleared out of the furnaces every day."

"Did you take that note?" struck in the high-pitched voice that belonged to Ruth Gladys Royal. "It was awfully important, John. The girls are counting on an answer to-night."

"I'm going over as soon as I have my dinner to-night, Miss," Towsky answered promptly.

"And you'll help us?" urged Ada.

"You can count on me, Miss," Towsky repeated in his slow English. "Those two sisters, they have no place here. This is a select school—a place for high-grade teachers. Miss Martha Nevins is stingy. And Miss Harriet, she has no, what do you say? No ability. That is it."

"Well, of course you understand," began Ada in a low tone that faded as she evidently turned and walked away.

Betty sat, dumbfounded, a shoe in either hand. She had listened in a daze. So Ada would seek to enlist the help of a man like Towsky in her efforts to lead a rebellion against the two new teachers!

"Towsky!" said Betty aloud. "Towsky!"

She put on her oxford and laced it.

"I'd believe anything of that girl now," she announced, as she began on the other shoe.

"Miss Betty!" One of the maids tapped at the partly opened door. "Miss Betty, are you in

there? Mr. Bob is upstairs waiting to see you."

"I'll be right up," Betty replied energetically.

"Have you found Miss Bobby yet, Maria?"

"Miss Bobby?" echoed the maid. "No'm, do you want her?"

"Well, I thought the boys would," Betty explained, straightening her blouse collar by jerking it true, "and I know where she is."

"That Tucker boy, he ain't come," announced Maria, who knew the girls' friends as well as they did. "Just Mr. Bob. And he asked particular for you."

"All right, I'm coming," Betty said, with a last hasty glance in the tiny mirror hung over the locker. "Find Miss Martha and tell her I've gone for a row on the lake with him—but wait till I'm down at the dock!" and away she ran.

"Bob, you lamb!" She greeted the lad with unconcealed enthusiasm. "I've had the worst day! Let's go rowing and have a little fun."

Bob did not find her enthusiasm contagious. He stood still and eyed her gravely.

"Just a minute, Betty," he said soberly. "Maybe we can go—if there is time. But I want to see Libbie first."

CHAPTER XI

BOB BRINGS NEWS

"OH!" SAID Betty, surprise in her expressive voice. "Why, I'll see if I can find her, Bob."

"Wait a minute," Bob interposed hastily. "Sort of stick around, won't you, Betty? I mean look in after a while—in case she cries, you know. I always feel like a chump when a girl cries."

"You do?" said Betty, laughter in her eyes.

But her mirth faded suddenly.

"What are you going to say to Libbie?" she demanded. "How can you make her cry? I won't tell her you're here if you are going to be mean to her, Bob Henderson."

Bob said exactly one word, as she had heard him say it a hundred times, as he had always spoken when she had been unreasonable or unjust.

"Betty!"

"I didn't mean that, Bob," she apologized contritely. "I'm sorry I was cross, but this place isn't encouraging sweet tempers at present. I'll go and find Libbie for you right away; only you

don't look as though you had something nice to tell her."

"It's something she must hear whether she likes it or not," said Bob grimly. "You needn't be afraid I'll be unfair, Betty. I'll try to be patient, too. I've watched you and Bobby with Libbie, and I'll hand you the prize for your method every time. Bobby jumps all over Libbie and makes her obstinate, but you go slow and win her confidence. Good Betsey, always looking out for the weak little sister."

Betty flashed him a grateful smile and went in search of Libbie. She found her in Edith Ames' room, a box of caramels between them and a pad of paper in Libbie's hand. She was, she informed Betty, composing a poem.

"What you need," announced Betty with vigor, "is more fresh air and less nonsense. Bob's down stairs, Libbie. He wants to see you."

Libbie's dark eyes were suddenly suspicious.

"What does he want to see me for?" she demanded almost resentfully.

"I do not know, for I did not ask him," Betty returned lightly. "Why not go down and find out?"

"Are you coming?" Libbie asked, putting down her pad and pencil with visible reluctance.

"In a minute," said Betty, turning into her

own room and leaving Libbie to go down to the reception room alone.

Fifteen minutes later, when Betty entered the little reception room, Libbie was sobbing into the sofa cushions and Bob was standing at the window, his back to her and the door.

"Libbie, darling!" cried Betty, kneeling before the weeping girl and trying to take her in her arms. "Libbie, don't cry so! What is the matter?"

Bob turned in time to catch a lightning glance of scorn from Betty's dark eyes.

"You've made her cry!" she said accusingly.

"I'm sorry," he answered very quietly.

"It isn't his fault," choked Libbie, raising a tear-stained face. "I'm crying—I guess I'm crying because I'm ashamed of myself."

"Oh!" said Betty, bewildered. "Are you?"

Bob came over and sat down on the small damask couch beside Libbie. His face was serious, but not severe. Betty had a sudden comfortable conviction that everything was going to be all right.

"Libbie," said Bob's kind voice, "shall we tell Betty? She'll help you, and you'll need some one to help you, you know."

Libbie nodded shamefacedly. She put out her hand and touched Bob's sleeve timidly.

"You tell her," she whispered.

Betty, still on her knees, put one firm, brown little hand over Libbie's.

"You tell, Bob," she said earnestly.

"Well, there isn't very much to tell," Bob declared. "That janitor fellow, Towsky—where did he get a name like that?—was caught this morning handing out a regular parcels-post to some of the cadets. There were letters and messages, and when the Commandant looked 'em over he made the pleasant discovery that apparently there's a system of translations and 'ponies' being exchanged. From what has leaked out, some of your girls haven't done a lesson in a fortnight. I thought Timmie looked pretty sick and when, on my way to drill, I found a slip of paper with his name written across it, I knew what was the matter. It was from Libbie, enclosing Latin to be translated."

Betty spoke, as Libbie seemed to be speechless.

"Where's Timmie?" she asked. "Why didn't he come over?"

"Doing pack drill," Bob answered drily. "His afternoons are engaged for the next two weeks. You see, two other girls sent him translations to do, so Libbie's good luck didn't save him. I must say Colonel Halsted has the right idea. He burned every scrap of paper, raked the boys fore and aft, and soaked them pack drill enough to keep them going every spare hour. He isn't going

to make a report of any kind to Mrs. Eustice; says he can take care of what happens on his own grounds and the boys are to take their medicine and keep still. I came over, because——”

Bob stopped and glanced at Libbie.

“Well, because,” he took a fresh start, “because I can’t go the idea of her using a chap like this Towsky for a messenger. He takes her money——”

“He does not!” flared Libbie, stung into speech. “I never gave him a cent—never!”

“Then Ada pays him,” Betty said calmly. “He doesn’t do it unless some one gives him money. Ada has the largest allowance of any girl in school.”

“All right, we’ll say that Ada pays him,” said Bob. “You can’t have a confederate—a go-between—in an underhanded affair like this and keep him at his distance. The mere fact that he knows you are willing to connive lowers you in his estimation. You’re an awful nice kid, Libbie, and I hate to see you making a—a——”

“Fool of myself,” gulped Libbie, trying to smile. “I guess I’m cured, Bob. I’ll try to do my own translating after this, even if Miss Harriet does pretty near kill us with work. You tell Timmie I’m so sorry we landed him in such a peck of trouble. Edith Ames and Jessie Wood sent him those other two slips, and I’m just as

much to blame, if mine was lost. Tell Timmie I'm sorry."

"I will," Bob promised, patting her on the shoulder as he rose to go. "Don't worry over what's past and gone, Libbie; but do be careful for the future. If you're uncertain what to do, you might ask Betty."

"Bob," said Libbie quickly, "tell me this: If Betty had sent you stuff to translate, wouldn't you have done it for her? Would you refuse to help her out when she asked you?"

Across the pretty little room Bob met Betty's eyes squarely.

"If Betty Gordon asked me to do something for her, I wouldn't have to think twice to know that it was on the square," he said in what Libbie called his "parade" voice. "It might not be wise, possibly it would not be the best thing to do, but it would never be dishonest. Want to walk down to the landing with me, Betty?" he finished simply.

Betty did. She felt as though the dried grass under her feet was a carpet of clouds on which she pranced light-heartedly. She could tell Bob now about the mishaps of the day and laugh over them as far as they affected herself.

"But, Bob, this scheme of Ada's is really serious," she said, as they came in sight of the dock and the canoe in which Bob had paddled across

the lake. "She has the weaker girls completely under her thumb—Ruth, of course, and Edith Ames and Jessie Wood. They have no minds of their own and never will have. And of course she has her own clique—Virgie Smith and Elsie Taylor, Violet Canby—all devoted to her. She did have Libbie, but thanks to you, I think we can count her on our side now."

"Libbie doesn't like Ada," Bob declared hastily. "Don't try to make me believe that."

"Oh, she doesn't like her," agreed Betty, "but she was afraid of her. Ada threatened her the night she was urging us to sign the petition, and I didn't know what she meant. Now I see that Libbie was afraid John Towsky or Ada would tell Mrs. Eustice about the letters to Timmie. I thought Libbie confided in me, but I don't believe she does."

"Libbie's an idiot," said Bob affectionately. "There's only one half of her here with us and the other half is living in some story she happens to be reading. All you girls ought to keep an eye on her. It's the dreamy people who do the foolish things when some one cracks the whip."

He slid easily into the canoe and took up the paddle.

"Don't look so solemn, Betsey," he said cheerfully, pushing off. "Libbie is all right, and a little pack drill will do Timmie good; he doesn't

get enough outdoor exercise. And 'tis proud of you I am, Miss Gordon—good day to you.”

“I wonder why Bob said that?” thought Betty, as she walked slowly back to the dormitory.

She would, she decided, go directly to Libbie’s room, and, if she were there, coax her to come for a little walk before dinner.

But when she reached Libbie’s room, Betty found Ada Nansen there and Ruth Gladys Royal.

“Somebody,” exclaimed Ada angrily, as she saw Betty, “has been tampering with Libbie! She was perfectly willing to act with us this morning, and now she flatly refuses.”

The idea of “tampering” with Libbie and Libbie’s convictions amused Betty. She giggled.

“Libbie had a narrow escape from suspension or being expelled,” she announced, sobering. “That may have helped her to see what you are asking her to do.”

Then in a few words she outlined the news Bob had brought them, emphasizing the generosity of the colonel, which had spared the girls sure and drastic punishment at the hands of Mrs. Eustice.

“I have nothing to do with that,” disclaimed Ada. “I don’t send notes to Salsette cadets.”

“But you pay the assistant janitor who takes them,” said Betty quietly.

The shot told. Ada flushed a deep crimson

and stalked haughtily from the room, followed by Ruth Gladys, her faithful shadow.

Betty talked cheerfully to Libbie till the dinner gong sounded and no more was said about the letters to Timothy Derby or Ada's proposed plans for a rebellion. Towsky had spread the news pretty generally through the school, and the conversation at dinner was more animated than it had been since Mrs. Eustice's departure. Every girl who had been concerned in the communications with Salsette registered a fervent vow never, never, *never* to be mixed up in an affair like that again. And they were loud in their praises of Colonel Halsted.

While the plates were being changed for the salad, Ada excused herself and went up to her room to get a handkerchief. In a few minutes the girls were startled to hear wild screaming. It was Ada, and her voice came nearer and nearer as she ran down, screaming loudly each step of the way.

"Burglars!" the terrified school made out as she burst into the dining room. "Thieves! Robbers! My emerald ring is gone! And I guess a whole lot of other things are gone, too!"

CHAPTER XII

A BRIEF TRIUMPH

ONE hundred and fifty-nine girls rose to their feet. One hundred and fifty-seven mouths opened to scream. Miss Martha Nevins covered her face with her hands while the white scars on her sister's face grew a dull red as she flushed with terror and excitement.

"Don't you dare scream!" cried Betty, climbing up on a chair and facing the room defiantly. "Keep still! Shrieking doesn't do a thing to help."

Bobby Littell reached out and clutched the hysterical Ada.

"You hush up!" she commanded her rudely. "Don't you know any better than to start a panic? Who's robbed? What did you see?"

Miss Anderson saw that Miss Martha Nevins had no intention of dominating the situation and that the other teachers were almost as frightened as their students. She left her place at the table and came over to Betty.

"Try to stop crying, Ada," she said kindly, but

firmly. "Girls, take your places. Finish dinner. I'll go upstairs and see what has happened."

"Let me go with you," Betty begged. "Oh, Miss Anderson, take me and Bobby."

"Volunteers always welcome," replied Miss Anderson, with a smile. "I don't suppose there is a thing to see, but hysterics calls for an investigation. We'll see if Ada's nerves need a tonic."

Betty decided that her own nerves were not any too steady when they gained the upper hall. Bobby actually indulged in a muffled shriek and Miss Anderson shrank back against the wall. Coming across the bridge that connected the dormitory with the next building was the assistant janitor, a gleaming little revolver pointed at them.

"So it's you!" he muttered, but before he could say more some one had brushed past Miss Anderson and the girls and with one well-directed blow had knocked the shining weapon from Towsky's hand. It fell with a clatter on the tiled floor.

"Let me catch you going around this place full o' nervous women toting a fool gun!" growled Dave McGuire. "What are you doing up here, any way? Your place is in the engine room."

"I heard a noise—screams," John Towsky explained, stooping to recover his revolver. "I came to see."

"Well, you go down again—and go quick,"

McGuire directed. "I'll do any investigating that's needed. And put that gun out of sight—don't forget!"

The assistant janitor slunk away and McGuire accompanied Miss Anderson and Betty and Bobby to their rooms. The moment Betty glimpsed her corridor she knew that Ada had not imagined everything.

"All the doors are open!" she gasped in horror.

So they were—the door of each room was flung back. The rooms themselves were not in great disorder, but the girls, trooping up from the dining room now and made braver by the presence of Dave McGuire, began to discover various losses.

"My wrist watch!" said Betty. "The lovely one Uncle Dick gave me!"

"My cameo pin!" This from Bobby.

"Two twenty dollar bills! I had them in my handkerchief box!" wailed Ada.

Frances Martin had lost a turquoise ring, highly valued because it had been her mother's. Constance Howard was divided between tears and rage when she discovered her tiny diamond cross was missing. Mrs. Eustice didn't let her wear it, but at least she could look at it, Constance said.

"I didn't lose a thing," said Libbie, with satisfaction.

Violet Canby, a friend of Ada's, reported that a five dollar bill had been taken from her purse.

"It had a big red blot on it and I was afraid to offer it in Edentown," she explained. "They're so fussy about what they'll accept and won't accept."

"Well, one of my twenty dollar bills was marked, too," Ada declared. "One corner was cut off. I caught it in my purse and accidentally ripped it. I hope it brings the thief bad luck."

A hasty examination proved that at least seven rooms had been visited by the thief or thieves and robbed. Some of the articles taken were of small value but others were worth considerable money.

"My beautiful wrist watch!" groaned Betty. "Oh, I wonder if it is gone forever!" The time-piece, of rare design, solid gold and set with tiny diamonds had been a recent gift from Uncle Dick and was prized beyond words.

The remainder of the evening proved rather hectic. The girls could not settle down to study. After the excitement they were inclined to jump if a door creaked and cry out when a sudden noise startled them. There was much visiting between the various rooms and comparison of notes till, at eight o'clock, Miss Martha Nevins sent them in a body to the study hall and the assembly room.

"I will not have my wishes ignored altogether,"

"Do you want detectives sent for?" Bobby asked bluntly.

"I don't care who is sent for," replied Ada, lacing her shoes. "It doesn't matter to me. Mother will send me more money the moment she gets my letter. But I do object to furnishing the Nevins sisters with the cash to buy their luxuries."

"Ada!" cried Betty desperately. "Ada! Ada! Do you realize what you are saying? That you're really accusing Miss Martha and Miss Harriet of theft?"

"Why not?" said Ada coolly. "Don't they look as though they need money? I'd rather be asked, of course, but I don't suppose I could contribute to a more needy cause."

"If you girls are coming out this morning—" Miss Anderson's tone suggested haste and the girls filed out, each busy with her own thoughts.

Ada returned from a trip to Edentown late that afternoon with her ideas strengthened.

"I'd like to tell you a thing or two, Betty Gordon," said Ada, meeting Betty on the stairs. "Perhaps you won't be so obstinate when you hear that your Miss Martha and Miss Harriet were in the post-office this afternoon."

Betty waited, silently.

"They were sending money orders!" Ada announced triumphantly. "Money orders, mind

you! And I'll bet a pound of caramels my money was in their purse. I happen to know they had to borrow from Madame last week, and it's very strange they have money to send away at this time."

From that afternoon matters grew worse. Ada flung caution to the winds and openly announced that she was "through."

"For mercy's sake, why doesn't she go home?" demanded Bobby irritably. "If she wants to shake the dust of Shadyside from her feet, who is hindering her? I don't think it's necessary for her to stay here and rescue the rest of us."

"But they always do," observed Louise quietly.

"Who always does what?" asked Bobby, with curiosity.

"Oh, the dissatisfied ones are forever trying to make others dissatisfied, too," Louise explained. "They won't give up and drop out—they want to take an army with them. Ada is going to lead something, and just at present she has her mind set on a rebellion."

"She's reckoning without Betty, then," returned Bobby. "Betty has just as much determination as Ada and considerably more brains. And the girls who are backing Ada are just plain sheep. But they're likely to run away from her instead of after."

But if Ada's followers were sheep, they were

tasting the delight of jumping over the pasture bars. The day following Miss Martha Nevins' announcement bedlam flourished in orderly Shadyside. Because there was no head—poor Miss Martha was utterly helpless as far as enforcing discipline was concerned—the individual teachers became the courts of last resort. They threatened, they entreated, as far as they were able they punished, but while they were dealing with one offender, a half dozen sinners were pursuing their own sweet ways. Excitable Madame lost her head entirely, and having vowed to spank Ada for an impudent retort, treated the school to the spectacle of a sprint from her classroom to Ada's room, where the latter slammed the door in Madame's face and slid the bolt.

Miss Anderson, snap and fire in her eyes and voice, persuaded Madame to return to her class and kept her own gymnasium classes to the mark. For the twentieth time Betty wondered why Mrs. Eustice had not left the capable physical training teacher in charge of the school.

It suited Ada to sing that night, and after dinner, ignoring the study hours, she seated herself at the piano in the assembly room and for more than an hour kept the school enthralled. Her voice was really lovely, but she could seldom be persuaded to use it. Bobby had once said that

Ada hated to do anything she thought would give some one else pleasure.

"Perhaps she is going to be sensible," said Betty hopefully, as the girls were undressing that night.

"You say that, because her music breaks you all up," Bobby retorted. "It doesn't have any effect on me—never did. You watch Ada Nansen to-morrow."

The suggestion was unnecessary. In the morning, the moment she entered the dining-room, Betty sensed that something was astir. There was an excited hum of talk and Betty heard Ada's name mentioned several times.

"The girls are going to march out before assembly," whispered Constance Howard. "Libbie told me. Ada has been coaxing her to go with them."

Bobby darted a severe look at her cousin and Betty an anxious one. Libbie, however, was a reassuring sight. She was placidly eating cereal and appeared to be composing a poem, since she was diligently counting rhymes on her fingers.

The sense of tension persisted throughout the meal, and most of the girls lingered in the halls instead of going to their rooms to get their books. At nine o'clock the bell rang for assembly.

"Ready?" cried Ada, springing to a position

near the door. "All girls who are not afraid to stand up for their rights, remember!"

To Betty's surprise, about thirty girls gathered around Ada.

"Ada!" Betty mounted the stairs to a place where she could see and be seen. "Don't do anything foolish! You'll be sorry. Mrs. Eustice is coming to-day; you know she is. You're getting the girls into a peck of trouble."

"The girls," said Ada, her voice shrill with excitement, "may do as they please. I will *not* stay among thieves!"

This was apparently her farewell, for she turned and marched out of the door, her cohorts straggling after her, giggling nervously.

"What does this mean?" asked Miss Martha, hurrying into the hall. "Answer me, instantly. What are those girls doing?"

Betty, trying to frame a reply, was interrupted by a muffled shriek from Bobby.

"Quick, quick!" that young person shouted. "Oh, Betty! Girls! Come quick! Look!"

All crowded to the doors and side windows. What they saw rendered them, for the moment, speechless. Betty recovered first.

"Mrs. Eustice!" she gasped.

CHAPTER XIII

HARD QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

AN AUTOMOBILE had driven into the drive just as the girls poured out of the hall. They stopped, surprised.

From the car stepped a tall, white-haired woman with marvelous dark eyes, exquisitely dressed for traveling. After her came a thin, sharp-faced woman who carried two umbrellas and a bag and looked at the world sourly through gold-rimmed spectacles.

It was Mrs. Eustice and Miss Prettyman.

The principal and the girls confronted each other for the briefest of moments. Amazement and guilt struggled for possession of Ada's face.

"What does this mean?" asked Mrs. Eustice icily. "You should be in assembly at this hour."

"We—we—we've struck!" stammered Ada. "Nothing is right and Miss Martha——"

Mrs. Eustice's dark eyes swept the group, and a cold chill shook their none-too-stiff backbones.

"Go back at once," she said in a level voice.

"Miss Prettyman, you attend to the taxicab man. I shall take assembly this morning."

The rebels, feeling very small and frightened, went obediently to the assembly hall and the remainder of the school filed in and took their accustomed places. A very stern and quietly efficient Mrs. Eustice, still in her traveling hat and veil, gave out the hymns and read the chapter. Every one waited for the announcement they were sure would be forthcoming, but they were dismissed as usual. The classes that followed were the most orderly—and incidentally, the most subdued—the harassed Shadyside teachers had conducted in many a day, but every girl sighed with relief when the last one was over for the day.

"They've had a faculty meeting!" announced Bobby, as she came up to put on a clean collar for dinner that night. "Ever since classes were over they've been buzzing around in the faculty room. I wouldn't be in Ada's shoes for fifty cents. When Mrs. Eustice is provoked, she can be as hard as cement."

It was impossible to learn what had been said at the faculty meeting, though there was plenty of speculation. During the study hour, Bobby was trying to get Betty to guess what might have been done, when a rap at the door interrupted.

"Come in," called Betty indifferently.

The door opened with a snap and there stood Miss Prettyman.

"I can't ask forgiveness for interrupting your studies," she said significantly, "since your voices have been sounding steadily for the last fifteen minutes. Mrs. Eustice wishes to see you in her office."

"Both of us?" faltered Bobby.

"Both of you," Miss Prettyman declared. "This entire corridor has been sent for to explain a number of things in which Mrs. Eustice is interested."

Sure enough, every girl on Miss Martha's corridor had been sent for. Libbie kept an imploring eye on Betty, sure that she was to be asked to explain her part in the communications carried by Towsky to Salsette. Ada and Ruth Gladys were flushed and ill at ease. Edith Ames looked as though she had been crying.

"Close the door, please, Betty," said Mrs. Eustice composedly, when the last girl had entered and found a seat.

Mrs. Eustice, in her soft black dinner gown, sat at her desk, the indirect light above giving a radiance to her shining white hair. She seemed another person from the friendly sympathetic principal they knew and dearly loved. Now she was remote, considering them as a stranger might.

"I need hardly say," she began in her smooth,

modulated voice, "that I have been amazed by the reports I have received this afternoon. A great deal of what has been told me seems inconceivable. I have sent for you girls because both Miss Martha Nevins and Miss Anderson assert that the opposing factions drew their leaders from this group."

The alert Betty noted that she used the past tense. Mrs. Eustice had no doubt that the "rebellion," if there had been one, was completely squelched. There remained but the official investigation.

"Ada, since you led the revolt, perhaps you will be able to tell me what motives impelled you," Mrs. Eustice suggested evenly.

Ada cleared her throat and glanced nervously at the intent faces watching her.

"Nothing was right, Mrs. Eustice," she faltered, rising. "Miss Harriet Nevins just piled lessons on us. She gave us whole pages to translate, and if we didn't do them, she gave us another page. The most Miss Sharpe ever gave us to do was twenty lines."

"I see," said Mrs. Eustice. "Anything more?"

"Well, they wear such awful clothes," murmured Ada.

"Ruth, have you anything to say?" Mrs. Eustice asked, shifting her probe.

Ruth Gladys Royal rose and held on to her chair desperately.

"The meals!" she gasped. "They were awful. Fried potatoes or boiled and once the meat was bad; we couldn't eat it. Aunt Nancy is away, you know."

"Betty!" Mrs. Eustice turned to Betty and the girl stood up, wondering if Bob felt as she did when he was being lectured on parade.

"Betty," said Mrs. Eustice coolly, "do you think Miss Harriet and Miss Martha Nevins wear poor clothes?"

"Not poor, perhaps," Betty answered slowly, "but poorly made and cut."

"Have you ever criticized their dress?" demanded the principal.

"I hope not," Betty said, her sincerity evident.

"Have the meals been poor?" asked Mrs. Eustice, and now her eyes were kindly and encouraging, but Betty did not see. She was looking down and her head was bent.

"Yes," she admitted reluctantly, "they have been pretty bad, Mrs. Eustice. I don't think it was Miss Martha Nevins' fault. Judy, the cook, must have been cheating her. Miss Anderson—" she hesitated.

"Miss Anderson told me her suspicions, and they are probably correct," Mrs. Eustice said

briefly. "Is there anything you would like to tell me, Betty?"

"No, Mrs. Eustice," said Betty instantly. She did not raise her eyes.

"Then I am to understand—" Mrs. Eustice said slowly. "I am to understand—" she paused, her hands fingering the long chain of jet she wore—"that this apparent revolt is ascribed to the plain clothing affected by two of the teachers, to an alleged severity in the matter of assigning lessons, and to poorly cooked meals. Am I right?"

No one answered.

"Ada, have I stated the causes fairly?" insisted Mrs. Eustice.

"Well, of course there was more than that to it," Ada reluctantly answered. "You know what I mean, Mrs. Eustice. This is a—a—cultured school, with a—a select——"

"Yes?" said Mrs. Eustice, her dark eyes changing, "I'm listening."

"It's a select school," blundered Ada, "and Miss Martha and Miss Harriet Nevins just don't fit in. I'm not saying a word against them, but they don't belong here. They're not a bit like any teachers we ever had." She had thought to mention the robbery but somehow did not dare.

"Perhaps it has not occurred to you, Ada, that

"I choose the faculty members?" Mrs. Eustice suggested.

Ada crimsoned. The inference was obvious—that she had criticized the principal's judgment.

"How many girls are implicated in this—we'll call it an uprising, I think," said Mrs. Eustice after a moment of silence.

"A few," Ada replied uncomfortably.

"Approximately how many?" questioned the principal.

"Thirty," Ada stammered.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you for their names, Ada," Mrs. Eustice said more briskly.

"As the acknowledged leader, I hold you responsible. I see no reason for questioning individuals. Who were the girls I saw on the steps with you this morning?"

"I don't remember them all," said Ada, who had been threatened with divers penalties by a number of badly frightened girls if she betrayed them.

"Then we'll have to help you," Mrs. Eustice declared. "Betty, were any of the girls in your room unit mixed up in this affair?"

"No, Mrs. Eustice," said Betty steadily.

"Libbie Littell was," Ada put in unexpectedly. "She——"

"No!" cried Betty hotly. "How dare you say a thing that isn't true!"

Bobby pulled the angry girl down into her chair as Mrs. Eustice stood up. Her slender figure seemed to tower over her polished desk.

"Don't lose your temper, Betty," she advised. "I'll ask Libbie herself to give us the facts."

Libbie could suffer agonies from shyness, but for once she forgot to be self-conscious. She faced Mrs. Eustice bravely.

"I *was* going to side with Ada and Ruth Royal," she confessed. "But I changed my mind after—after I wasn't afraid of Ada any more."

Mrs. Eustice smiled a little, then sighed.

"We'll go no further with this to-night," she said, to the amazement of the listening girls. "To-morrow morning I shall have something to say."

"Yes, but what will she have to say?" asked Bobby nervously, as the girls trooped back to their rooms. "She looks as though she had plenty on her mind, but I suppose we'll have to wait."

"To-morrow," said Libbie dolorously, "will come soon enough."

CHAPTER XIV

JUST A LITTLE STORY

IN SPITE of Miss Martha Nevins' strict injunctions, there was much visiting between the different rooms that evening. Betty and Bobby held a reception to all intents and purposes and were kept busy satisfying the curiosity of the girls who had not been present at the conference.

"Ada Nansen says she'll pay you back, Betty," Dora Estabrooke reported. "She's furious at you. I don't see why, myself. Mrs. Eustice saw most of us out on the steps, and I'm not going to try to fib out of it. If I'm expelled, I'm expelled and that's all there is to it."

"No wonder you're too fat," said Bobby, with characteristic frankness. "You haven't ambition enough to get yourself out of a mess, once you've tumbled into it. I suppose the real reason you were on Ada's side, you were too lazy to argue against her."

"Ada hasn't any right to be mad at Betty," Libbie declared. "She was just taking my part

when Ada was deliberately trying to get me blamed for something I didn't do."

At this point Miss Martha Nevins flung open the door and stood on the threshold, gazing grimly at the bevy of girls perched on beds and chairs and window seats.

"I do not intend to repeat my request that no visiting be done during study hours," she announced sternly. "I shall report every one of you to Mrs. Eustice if you leave your own rooms again this evening."

And there was no greater proof needed that law and order had returned to Shadyside than the prompt departure of the visitors afforded. Reinforcements had come to Miss Martha.

"Aunt Nancy's back!" exclaimed Bobby, as she sat down to breakfast the next morning.

There was no doubt of it. The oranges, delicately sliced, the cereal, steaming hot with plenty of cream, the toast served in white napkins—all spoke of a general in the kitchen.

"Mrs. Eustice must have telegraphed her and sent an airplane to fetch her," giggled Constance Howard.

But they learned later that Aunt Nancy, with uncanny penetration, had "calculated" the return of "Miss Callie" and had gauged it to a day.

Mrs. Eustice presided at the assembly exercises, the faculty occupying their accustomed

places on the platform. At the conclusion of the second hymn a rustle went over the school, for instead of giving the dismissal signal the principal turned to the teachers and spoke in a low voice. Instantly the two Nevins sisters rose and left the room.

"I have asked the Misses Nevins to wait in my private office while I speak to you," said Mrs. Eustice, turning to face the sea of expectant faces. "I have something to say to you that intimately concerns them and might embarrass them to hear."

She closed the heavy Bible and stepped to the side of the pulpit desk, leaning an arm on its ledge, her favorite attitude when addressing her girls. None of them knew what was coming, but they were surprised at her first words.

"I wish to tell you girls a little story this morning," said Mrs. Eustice. "Perhaps it is an ordinary story, but it is a true one, and no story about life as it is really lived can be quite commonplace."

She stopped, her dark eyes roving dreamily over the hall. Then the delightful voice went on.

"I doubt if any girl who is listening to me this morning," she said clearly, "knows what it means to be poor. Well, there may be one or two exceptions"—Betty Gordon was sure that the dark eyes rested for the fraction of an instant

on the intent faces of Alice and Norma Guerin—"but I am sure that none of you has ever been hungry because there was not enough food in the house to supply the wants of a family. I knew two girls—sisters—who until they were eight years old had never been satisfied at a single meal. What little food there was had to be divided among many small and hungry mouths. These two girls were the oldest in a family of five children. They never had a whole dress to wear, let alone a pretty one. They have never, to this day, had a really pretty dress."

Did Betty imagine it, or did a slight murmur go across the hall?

"When the sisters were six years old—they are twins—their father died," said Mrs. Eustice. "When they were eight an illness took their mother and the three younger children, leaving the girls alone in the world. They were 'bound out' in different families, but in the same town."

Betty leaned forward. She would never be able to hear the term "bound out" without a little catch at her heart. Bob Henderson had been a "bound boy" and an orphan. Not even his present good fortune and his hardly won virtues of self-reliance and cheerful courage could ever make up to him—so said Uncle Dick—for his unhappy little boyhood.

"Though Fate had been unkind to these two

little girls," Mrs. Eustice continued to her absorbed audience, "she had given them one priceless gift: both had minds of exceptional brilliance and promise. Fortunately, the teacher in the village school was a conscientious woman and an intelligent one. She recognized the ability of her two new pupils and she was interested enough to call on the families with whom the girls lived and explain to them that if Martha and Harriet could be educated, they would, in all likelihood, become far more valuable members of society than they could ever be as domestic workers. I have often thought that young folk value education in the proportion to which they must struggle to obtain it," added Mrs. Eustice more slowly.

Betty had a sudden vision of the girls at Shady-side—happy, well-cared-for, charmingly dressed. The majority of them studied under compulsion and they grumbled without ceasing at the amount of work piled upon their shoulders. If Mrs. Eustice could have been prevailed upon to present a diploma for a certain requisite number of years' attendance, many girls would have been satisfied to accept it, making no demands in the name of scholarship.

"Martha and Harriet were determined to secure an education," said Mrs. Eustice gravely. "Their teacher encouraged them, but it is doubtful if she ever knew the sacrifice that effort en-

tailed. The sisters rose at five o'clock often, to have time for study. They were kept out of school on the slightest pretext. Because, when they reached high school, proper clothes became a necessity, they were required to do extra tasks, that the clothes might be paid for, they were told. As a matter of fact, until they were eighteen, neither sister had ever had a new frock or coat. Their clothes were made over for them from old material contributed by charitable-minded folk. You girls who love pretty things to wear, think this over. Would you go through four years of high school if your clothes set you apart from the other students, if it was impossible for you to take part in any of the fun and frolicking, because your days were so planned for you that ever moment was employed? I wonder."

They were wondering, too, those pretty, luxuriously bred girls. They were thinking industriously.

"Harriet and Martha finished the village high school when they were sixteen," Mrs. Eustice went on. "They wished to be teachers, and there was every reason to believe that they were adapted to that vocation. But there was college ahead of them. Then began a heart-breaking six years—they were not yet free, the law releases a bound child at eighteen—and they must take post-graduate work to pass the college en-

trance examinations. With really amazing courage, they argued and pleaded and promised to get that two years more of high school in, and when they were eighteen they were ready for college. The teacher who had first helped them borrowed a little money from some friends, and Martha and Harriet started their college career with the humblest of wardrobes, the slightest of backing, and the burden of a debt. I'm afraid this isn't a very gay story," the principal apologized, a sad little droop lining her expressive mouth, "but I am coming to the end.

"The first year of college was the most difficult, from a financial standpoint. After that the sisters each obtained a scholarship, and there was tutoring. They were exceptionally brilliant, but carrying their own schedules and teaching was a heavy tax on their physical strength. Martha broke down in her third year and her illness cost their slender savings. However, they managed to hold out to graduate with honors. They were offered positions in the high school in the town where they lived, and they went back there to spend the summer."

There was no doubting the interest of the girls. One hundred and sixty pairs of eyes were fixed intently on Mrs. Eustice.

"That was a happy summer for them," went on the principal quietly, "though they worked in-

cessantly, for it was necessary to earn money for their living expenses. They had paid the debt incurred for their first college year and they made themselves some simple frocks for classroom wear. When school opened they were even busier and happier—it was work they liked and their worst troubles seemed over.

“Then, one Saturday, the house next to their boarding place burned. Harriet saw the flames and knew that there were children there, alone, for she had seen their parents drive away a few hours before. It was a cold November day and at first she thought the smoke she smelled was from a wood fire some one had started. When she saw the house was actually on fire, Harriet dashed in and started to hunt for the children. She found them just in time, and forced them to jump from a second story window. They escaped with minor bruises, but the flames had reached Harriet before she succeeded in getting the girls out of the window, and her poor face and hands were sadly scarred. She suffered the most intense pain for weeks. Martha rounded out the teaching year alone. When Harriet was well again she found she was so disfigured that people commented on her appearance. Foolishly sensitive, perhaps, she resigned her position and, with her sister, sought another school where she was not known. She taught another year in a public high

school and was specially commended. Because the sisters wished to teach the subjects in which they had majored at college, they registered for places in a private school. This fall they came to Shadyside."

Mrs. Eustice stopped. She looked down at her girls gravely, motionless.

A quiver, a slight rustle, the ghost of a sigh went over the hall. The tension relaxed.

"Well, I don't know how you feel, but just now a flea would look big beside me," Bobby whispered to Betty. "I hate to think of the silly things I've said. What do clothes and looks really matter?"

Betty nodded understandingly. Many of the girls looked ashamed as they remembered unkind and caustic comments they had made about the two sisters.

"Ada won't give in," murmured Louise.

Sure enough, Ada Nansen was rising.

"But, Mrs. Eustice," she said, her manner almost resentful, "you mustn't think that we were finding fault with—with—well, the way Miss Martha and Miss Harriet Nevins looked and acted. I don't know whether you know it or not, but there was a robbery while you were away. I lost forty dollars and an emerald ring, and some of the other girls——"

"That will do, Ada." Mrs. Eustice spoke with

decision. "I have heard the details from the faculty. I do not wish that incident discussed in any way by the school until we have more proofs than I have in hand at present. The fairest thing—the only fair thing—to do is to avoid suspicion and conjecture for a time. The matter will be fully investigated. Assembly is dismissed."

Rather shamefacedly, the girls scattered to their classes. The story they had just heard was not to be lightly forgotten. Strangely enough they had not thought to ask how Miss Harriet came to be scarred, and it was something of a shock to learn that her disfigurement was the result of her sacrifice.

"But at that," argued Bobby perplexedly, "I can't understand why Mrs. Eustice left Miss Martha in charge of the school. You said yourself, Betty, that Miss Anderson was the logical choice."

"Perhaps I can set your mind at rest on that point, Bobby," Miss Anderson herself replied.

CHAPTER XV

BOB IS ENTERTAINED

BOBBY clutched Betty wildly.

"Good grief! I beg your pardon, Miss Anderson," she stammered. "I didn't know you were behind us."

"No, I think it likely you didn't," Miss Anderson answered collectedly. "So you assumed I was the logical choice to head the school, Betty?"

Betty blushed, but she faced the bantering eyes honestly.

"I suppose I said it and I certainly thought it many times, Miss Anderson," she said. "We girls talk a lot among ourselves, you know."

"I do know—to my sorrow and despair as well as amusement and delight," the physical training teacher admitted. "If I tell you girls a small secret, I must trust to your honor not to let it go further."

Both girls promised earnestly not to repeat.

"I have every confidence in you," said Miss Anderson, putting an arm around Betty and

smiling at Bobby. "I may scold you now and then when you deserve it, but you and the girls with whom you chum are sound and sweet to the core. I only wish that Shadyside could have more like you. Well, this isn't at all what I wanted to tell you," she broke off. "I started to tell you the reason Miss Martha Nevins was left in charge of the school. Aside from her splendid teaching ability—and she and her sister are brilliant teachers—Mrs. Eustice wished her to have the prestige that would come from the position and the generous salary that accompanied the title of head. To be able to say that she was in charge of Shadyside for two weeks in the absence of the principal and secretary will weigh heavily with the teachers' registration agencies, should Miss Martha plan to teach in another school some day."

"But she wasn't a good head," argued Bobby stubbornly. "She hasn't a bit of discipline. My father says the ability to handle men is a gift."

"Then the ability to handle girls is more than a gift," declared Miss Anderson, laughing. "I don't intend to discuss that with you, Bobby. I'll merely mention that any girl who is two minutes late to gym class to-day will pay for it with fifteen minutes of track work after school."

The mere presence of Mrs. Eustice acted like a charm, and in two days the school was func-

tioning smoothly, with never a ripple in the even rounds of study, recitation, and pleasure. Relieved of their extra responsibility, the Misses Nevins began to display the gifts of their fine minds, and the girls discovered that once their interest was aroused, it was stimulating to study under such enthusiastic guides.

"Of course they still look like the last roses of summer, and I think Miss Harriet ought to wear a mask," Ada said carelessly. "But at that, they're rather good when it comes to explaining something you don't understand."

On the other side of the lake, word went forth at Salsette that "Shadyside is right side up with care again and why don't we go nutting the way we did last year?"

"Wait till I get through this blamed pack drill," implored Timothy, and his chums loyally waited.

The last few days were remitted for exemplary behavior, and Bob, delegated to arrange for a hike, with nuts as the objective and the girls as companions, went to Shadyside.

He asked for Betty and the little maid had gone in search of her when some one opened the door that led from the reception room into one of the private offices. It was Miss Prettyman who, after inspecting Bob and learning that he wished to see Betty, returned to her work of typing, leaving the door fastened back.

"Clack!" sounded the busy keys of her machine. "Clack! Clack!"

"How do you do, Bob Henderson," said a voice that certainly was not Betty's and Ada Nansen was smiling at him.

"Betty has gone to Edentown," purred Ada. "But of course I'll take a message for her—be glad to. It's been so long since I've seen you."

Bob registered a mental vow that never again would he visit a girl's school without a trusted chum at his side.

"Thank you," he said formally, "but I must see Betty. I want to talk over something with her."

"You're very fond of Betty, aren't you?" Ada replied, to his horror settling herself in one of the pretty chairs as though she meant to prolong the conversation.

"We have known each other a long time," Bob said, wondering why Ada wore such an elaborate dress on a school day. At least he supposed it was elaborate—it had a great many ends and floating ribbons that distracted his eye.

He was determined not to mention the nutting party. There was Miss Prettyman who would certainly try to veto the plan, and Ada, of course, would think that she should be invited.

"I'd like to know Betty better than I do," pursued Ada. "She is rather stand-offish, you know. I'd love to have her come and spend the summer

with me, but she never seems to want to leave her uncle."

"Uncle Dick wouldn't let her visit you, if she wanted to," thought Bob, but what he said was: "Betty is crazy about Uncle Dick."

"If we knew each other better, I'm sure we'd get along better than we do," said Ada, lowering her voice. "Betty is so impulsive, she leaps to conclusions, and often she is unjust. Now there's John Towsky, our assistant janitor. Betty is prejudiced against him for some reason. I think it is because he is foreign. She won't say a good word for him."

"I think he's a pretty poor specimen myself, if you are interested to have my opinion," Bob proclaimed, not lowering his voice. "The less Betty has to do with him, the better."

"Bob," said Ada confidentially, "I've often wondered if you have any authority with Betty—whether you're responsible to Mr. Gordon for her or anything like that. It's so unusual for a girl to be without parents and guardian, too, as Betty seems to be."

"Mr. Gordon is her guardian, as well as her uncle," Bob announced stiffly.

"But she never seems to have to consult any one," persisted Ada. "She does exactly as she pleases and she seems accustomed to having her own way."

"As long as she uses judgment, why not?" Bob countered, wondering what idea was behind Ada's questions. "If Betty should need advice——"

"If you have *quite* finished discussing me," broke in a hard little voice, as Betty stepped between the portières, "perhaps you'll be able to set me right. Maria told me you wanted to see me, Bob."

Ada rose with practised grace.

"Bob has been waiting for you, dear," she said swiftly. "I must say I think you're lucky to have such a pleasant substitute guardian when you can't be under your uncle's eyes. I have to take a music lesson now, so I'm sure you'll excuse me."

She went out of the room and a stormy-eyed Betty confronted Bob. The typewriter was still clicking away composedly in the office. Bob made one step backward and closed the door softly.

"How dare you talk about me like that? And with Ada Nansen!" choked Betty. "I think you're too mean! I can't tell you what I think. And I'll never trust you again as long as I live!"

Bob's chin hardened in a familiar way, but it was a Bob the girl had never seen who faced her steadily.

"I won't stand for that, Betty," he said very quietly. "You sit down in that chair there and listen to me. Sit down!"

To her surprise, Betty sat down.

"I came over here to see you about something special," said Bob, in the same repressed tone, and he seemed to tower over her. "Ada waltzed in and said you had gone to Edentown and would I leave the message with her? Naturally I wouldn't. Then she sat down and apparently tried to find who was your guardian—why, I'd be pleased to learn. I gave her the briefest possible answers to her questions, and the only reason I stayed, was because I was hoping you'd get back. I violated no confidences of yours. I never have. Now do you believe me, or don't you?" he added, with sudden fierceness.

Betty looked at him respectfully.

"Yes, Bob," she said meekly, "I believe you."

His face cleared and his shoulders squared as though he were relieved.

"Well, you'd better," he declared humorously.

"But—don't be angry, Bob—you didn't tell Ada you were my substitute guardian, did you?" Betty questioned.

Bob's hearty laugh was an answer in itself.

"If I were your guardian, Betty Gordon," he informed her, his eyes twinkling, "there would be times when I'd feel as though I hadn't done my duty by you. I think you need an eagle eye on you, all right; but far be it from me to assume the job."

Betty made a face at him just as the door

opened and Miss Prettyman advanced into the room.

"I came to invite some of the girls to go on a nutting party," said Bob easily. "Saturday morning will be all right then, Betty?"

Betty nodded, speechless for the moment.

"Mrs. Eustice will have something to say, I fancy," Miss Prettyman remarked. "I don't think the conduct of the school during the last two weeks has merited many parties, young man."

"But surely the penance can wait," suggested Bob, "and the nuts won't. We'll see that you have a bag of specially fine nuts to salt, Miss Prettyman."

Wily Bob remembered that Miss Prettyman had a weakness for hickory nuts which she salted herself.

"I would like some nice, well-filled nuts," the teacher replied. "I've heard that the crop is abundant this year."

"We'll see that you have the finest," promised Bob. "And of course—ye gods, what was that?"

CHAPTER XVI

MADELINE'S MOUNTAIN

"THAT" was a combination of sounds calculated to upset even well-trained nerves. Miss Prettyman permitted herself a ladylike scream as one of the portières sagged with a ripping sound, parted from the pole and fell to the hall floor, accompanied by a thud, the noise of splintering wood, and the crash of broken glass.

"Look out!" Bob sprang forward, and to Betty's excited eyes seemed to gather up the portière carefully in his arms.

In another moment she saw that Ada was wrapped in the folds of the curtain.

"Goodness gracious, Ada Nansen!" gasped Miss Prettyman, startled out of her usually precise English. "What in the world were you doing? Have you hurt yourself?"

Divested of the folds of the heavy curtain, Ada stood revealed, much flushed and patently ill at ease.

"I tripped," she stammered. "I went to save myself and caught hold of the first thing I came

to, which happened to be the curtain. No, I'm not hurt. I'm all right."

Miss Prettyman stepped over the sill and glanced into the hall.

"The console table is broken and the flower vase is smashed," she announced. "Did you fall headlong into the table, Ada?"

"Yes," Ada said eagerly, while Bob looked significantly at Betty. "That was it, Miss Prettyman. I felt dizzy." And she put a hand pathetically to her head.

But Miss Prettyman wasted small time in sympathy.

"It's very odd, if you stumbled into the table," she observed, "that one of the legs should be completely split from the body. It looks to me as though you had been standing on the table and your weight broke it down and that then you caught the portière as you felt the table giving way under you and brought it down in a heap."

Ada's face was the color of her crimson sweater.

"Of course I wasn't standing on the table!" she said angrily. "What would I do such a silly thing for?"

Miss Prettyman's sharp eyes glimmered with a wintry smile.

"You might wish to listen to what was being said in the next room," she declared distinctly. "And to see, without being seen," she added. "By

standing on the console table, placed just outside the door, you could look over the curtain pole and see and hear—whatever you wished to see and hear.”

Ada stared in dumb fascination at the woman who could make such shrewd deductions.

“Were you listening, Ada?” asked Miss Prettyman, while Bob stirred uneasily. He would have liked to “duck.”

“Certainly not,” Ada retorted sharply. “I wouldn’t be guilty of such an underhanded act. Would I, Bob?” she suddenly appealed to him.

“I hope not,” he said soberly. Then a group of girls came down the stairs and Ada slipped away without further argument.

“She was listening, though,” declared Betty, as Miss Prettyman went in search of one of the janitors to remove the broken table and sweep up the glass. “I know she was.”

“Don’t waste time on her,” Bob counseled. “Get Mrs. Eustice to let the girls go on Saturday. We’re going to take one of the school busses and we’ll go up to Madeline’s Mountain and have a regular lark. We’ll promise to get you back by four o’clock, so we won’t need a chaperone. Not with our crowd!”

“I’ll look after the lunch,” promised Betty, as Bob went down the steps. “Aunt Nancy is back, and she likes to put up lunches.”

Betty was unanimously elected to get the permission of Mrs. Eustice for the Saturday frolic. She secured it, but not without being thoroughly cross-examined.

"Ordinarily, I should be tempted to veto the automobile," said Mrs. Eustice gravely. "But if George is taken as chauffeur, I think I shall feel safe."

Betty hastened to spread the good news and then to notify Aunt Nancy that a lunch sufficient to satisfy sixteen healthy young appetites would be needed.

"And George is going, too—don't forget him," she added.

"He can eat as much as any sixteen I ever see," grumbled Aunt Nancy.

But Betty knew that she would put them up a generous lunch and that no one need suffer from hunger, no matter how keen the appetites whetted by the drive in the crisp, cold air.

It was "snappy weather" now, as Bobby Littell described it, and the eight girls who came out to meet the Salsette bus the Saturday morning set for the nutting party were warmly and sensibly dressed. Their bright-colored brushed wool sweaters made a pretty picture, and Miss Anderson, who was on hand to see them off, approved unstintingly of their shoes.

"I like to see girls appropriately dressed for

a tramp or a ball," she announced. "But deliver me from the girl who tries to combine the two outfits."

The girls laughed and climbed into the bus, where the tactiturn George was already seated at the wheel.

"I don't know as this machine will go far," he said cautiously, as he turned out upon the lake road. "Looked her over last night and it seemed to me she was the least bit doubtful. Those Salsette mechanics don't know as much as they might."

Since George had never been known to undertake the shortest trip to the station without some doleful prediction similar to this, his passengers refused to be made apprehensive. And when they picked up the boys—sitting in a row on the stone wall of the Academy—even George was not proof against the infectious high spirits that prevailed. There was room for them all to be seated comfortably, the Academy busses being twice the length of those in use at Shadyside, the day was a perfect blend of sunshine, wind and bracing atmosphere, and here were sixteen young people, the best of friends, on pleasure bent. What more could any one ask of a Saturday?

"Libbie," began Tommy Tucker, "did you ever hear the story of Madeline's Mountain?"

"Oh, no," Libbie said eagerly. "How did it

get that name, Tommy? I've always wanted to know."

A young and beautiful maiden, whose name was Madeline, was engaged to a young and handsome man, who, wishing to perpetuate the beauty of his fiancée, began to carve her profile in stone on a flat slab somewhere on the mountain. The maiden died when the carving was half done, and he finished it from memory and then committed suicide with the carving knife—er—whatever they call the thing sculptors work with. Right on the slab of stone, Libbie."

"Good gracious!" gasped Libbie, spellbound. "How awful!"

"Well, the point is," Tommy continued, "no one was ever able to find the slab of rock or the body of the unfortunate and handsome young man. It is supposed the undergrowth covered them."

"And the girl's name was Madeline?" breathed Libbie.

"It was," Tommy assured her.

"You'd better tie a rope to Libbie, the moment we get to the mountain," Bobby advised. "Nothing will keep her from searching for that slab of rock. I can tell you right now how many nuts she will pick."

"I've promised Miss Prettyman a bag of hick-

ories," said Bob. "It's a matter of duty to get them."

"What was the young man's name?" Libbie inquired eagerly.

A shout of laughter greeted this question. Tommy glanced wickedly at their chauffeur's broad back.

"His name, Libbie," he announced gravely, "was George."

"Huh!" grunted George, in great disdain, his eyes on the road ahead. "Is that so?"

"You ought to be proud to have the same name," Libbie informed him indignantly. "I think that was a lovely, romantic thing to do—carve the picture of your diseased fiancée in stone—so there!"

"Are you sure you don't mean 'deceased', Libbie?" suggested Torrey Blake respectfully.

"Do I?" Libbie said. "Perhaps I do. I sometimes get those two mixed."

"If Madeline and her young man walked up this road often, I don't wonder she died," commented Betty. "It's about as rough a thoroughfare as I'd care to cover."

"If we break down now, we're ten miles from a garage," George observed cheerfully.

"The bus isn't going to break down," Bobby announced vigorously. "Why always look for the worst to happen?"

"Then you won't be disappointed," Tommy Tucker informed her neatly. "Hey, somebody catch it! What was that?"

"Something fell out," Frances Martin declared.

"Stop the bus!" called half a dozen excited voices. "George, stop her!"

"What for?" asked George placidly.

"Something fell out!"

"Well, is it something you want?" George inquired mildly.

"Good grief, how do we know? We want to find what fell out," said Tommy Tucker, already half way to the back step.

"I'll go. I know what it was," Timothy Derby announced suddenly. "Get out of the way, Tommy!"

George consented to stop the bus and Timothy ran back to the dark object lying in the road.

"A book!" chorused the watchers, as he stooped to pick it up. "A book! If it's poetry, we'll confiscate it on sight."

CHAPTER XVII

IN HOLIDAY MOOD

"LIBBIE won't be able to listen to any poetry to-day, Timmie," Gil Lane said seriously, as the flushed and breathless Timothy resumed his place in the bus.

"Who said she would?" Timothy demanded hardily.

"Isn't that poetry? Here, hand it over," ordered Gil, and he made a dive to get possession of the book.

Timothy managed to protect his property by sitting on it, and George let the car shoot forward so suddenly that Gil bumped his head smartly against the top.

"Now will you be good?" jeered Timothy.

"When do you calculate to begin to nut?" George asked, by way of diversion.

"When we get to the mountain," said Tommy explicitly.

"I don't know what you call that, but folks around here call it Madeline's Mountain," George drawled, pointing to a narrow trail that started

at one side of the road and wound out of sight between dense undergrowth.

"All out!" cried Bob. "This way for nuts and ozone. Ladies first!" and, as the car stopped, he sprang out and stood ready to help the girls down.

"Are you coming, George?" Betty asked, when they were all out, Timothy with a bulge in his pocket of book dimensions.

"That I am not," the redoubtable George assured her. "I've brought my paper and my pipe, and here I stay till you want to go back. Mrs. Eustice said you must be at the school by four. I've my lunch and all, so don't be troubling your heads about me."

"He could get along fine on a desert island," Bobby observed, as the party started up the trail, the boys carrying the boxes of lunch. "I'll bet he takes a long nap this afternoon."

Bob and Betty gradually took the lead. Both were excellent climbers and made light of the ascent. They pressed forward and came out at the end of the trail first, finding themselves in a clearing on the side of the mountain.

"Sit down and get your breath," Bob counseled, pointing to an old tree stump. "I've hardly had a chance to talk to you since school opened. How is the term going for you, Betsey?"

"All right, now that Mrs. Eustice is back," said Betty, perching on the stump and turning

her pretty, flushed face toward him. "Things were really awful while she was gone—you know that. And, oh, Bob, I don't believe I've told you about the robbery!"

"Robbery?" repeated Bob, looking disturbed. "In the school, you mean?"

He listened attentively while Betty eagerly outlined for him what had occurred, not forgetting the loss of her own beautiful wrist watch.

"And Mrs. Eustice won't let the girls talk about it," she concluded. "She says that we have no proofs of any one's guilt. But I can't believe that either of those teachers would steal. They have good salaries. What would they turn thieves for?"

"That's nonsense, of course," said Bob impatiently. "And I think Mrs. Eustice is right about keeping the thing quiet. Let it be generally talked of, and either the real thief will be shielded or some innocent person will come in for a lot of unpleasant notoriety, while if an investigation is carried on quietly, the thief may grow bold and betray himself."

"Well, don't tell the boys," cautioned Betty. "Remember I've only told you because—because I tell you everything."

"Good girl," approved Bob. "Tell me one thing more—how long ago did this happen?"

"Last week just before Mrs. Eustice came

back," Betty replied, wondering a little at the question.

Bob whistled, the peculiar whistle that always denoted a conclusion reached.

"That fits in," he said thoughtfully. "Betty, John Towsky has been having a high old time in town all this week. I saw him dressed up in dazzling raiment, and the ticket taker at the movies said he hasn't missed a night lately. He's been treating his friends at that shooting gallery, too. Tommy saw him there one night and I saw him a couple of afternoons."

"He gets tips," said Betty, before she took thought.

Then the others came up and dropped panting on the ground to rest and compare notes.

"We're two short," said Bob, after a rapid count. "Where are Libbie and Timothy?"

"Libbie is probably hunting for the stone slab," Tommy submitted, "and Timothy has either followed her or has got lost. Or maybe he stunned himself by walking into a tree head-on, as he recited Browning."

"We ought to keep together," said Betty, a bit anxiously. "We'll waste time hunting each other unless we keep in a fairly close group. Bob, won't you call and see if you can't make Libbie hear? Or Timothy—they must be together."

"Let Bob do the work," Tommy agreed pleas-

antly. "I'm tired. I don't doubt the handsome young man and the beautiful young maiden died early deaths. I have heart palpitations this minute—or can I be hungry?"

"You don't eat at this time in the morning, if you are hungry," Bobby informed him, as Bob shouted down the trail. "You're getting fat, Tommy Tucker, and I think a fat boy in a uniform looks like—like a sausage."

"I am not fat!" scolded Tommy, genuinely ruffled, for girls are not alone in their horror of gaining weight. "No one stands a chance to get fat with drill every day in the week. Bob is splitting the echoes all right, isn't he?" he added, as a second hail sounded.

"Where do you suppose they can be?" worried Betty. "We'll have to start a search if they don't come in a few minutes."

"There's no sense in Libbie doing something foolish every time we go for a hike," asserted Bobby, whose English, the quiet Louise had been heard to observe, also went "on a hike" frequently.

"Now children, no squabbling," said Frances Martin. "I think we'd better go down the trail and gather up the missing ones. They must have stopped *en route*."

Betty eagerly seconding her suggestion, they started down the trail again. Though they stopped and called at frequent intervals, no one

answered and at last even Bobby admitted to uneasiness.

"Look!" whispered Betty, when they were near enough to the road to see it through the trees.

"Well!" Bob's whisper was eloquent.

Peacefully enthroned on the bus step sat Libbie, chin in her hand, rapt gaze fixed on Timothy, who sat cross-legged on the grass at the side of the road. He was reading aloud. On the driver's seat, George listened, apparently enthralled.

With a wild war-whoop, Tommy Tucker bounded forward before Betty could stop him.

"Ah, the Saturday Literary Society meeting, I see," he gibed. "Are we interrupting?"

Libbie smiled sweetly and, not at all disconcerted, scrambled down from the step.

"Were you looking for us?" she asked calmly.

"Words can't do us justice, so why use words?" Bob addressed the searching party with equal calm. "Put that book away, Mr. Derby. This is a nutting party, allow me to remind you. And, having been brought along to gather nuts, you're going to do your share, or we'll know the reason why. Lend a hand, will you, Tommy?"

Tommy grasped one elbow and Bob the other and between them they marched the protesting Timothy up the trail in double quick time, Bobby and Betty helping Libbie along at the same rapid pace.

"Now, then," announced Bob, when they came out in the clearing, "we'll eat, because the lunch boxes are a nuisance to carry around. And after we eat, we'll gather nuts."

"Yes, sir," said Timothy meekly.

Not a crumb of that lunch went begging, and when they had finished, the Tucker twins were in a state of coma. At least so Bob explained their disinclination to go further up the hill.

"It's your solemn duty," he warned the lazy pair, "to get some nuts for Miss Prettyman. Probably, your whole happiness for the winter rests on your ability to please her this trip."

Tommy staggered to his feet and dragged his reluctant twin to an upright position.

"If we must, we must," he groaned. "Where do the hickory trees grow on this hillside?"

"Forward, march!" directed Bob. "I know a good place."

"I wish," Libbie sighed to Betty, "that we could find that slab of rock. I'd just like to see it."

"Maybe you'd wish you hadn't, afterward," said Bobby, who had overheard.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE OPERETTA ROLES

BOB leading the way, they tramped across the clearing and came to a belt of hickory trees. The ground beneath them was thickly strewn with nuts, and the party set busily to work to fill the muslin sacks they had brought.

"I don't see why Bob is so determined to take back the best to Miss Prettyman," Constance Howard observed.

"Because he promised. Isn't that the reason, Bob?" demanded Betty.

"Um—partly," Bob admitted. "But the real reason goes deeper. I'm trying an experiment."

"I know. I should think you'd blush to confess it," said Tommy Tucker sorrowfully. "You hope the old lady will suffer from indigestion."

"That shows how limited your mental capacity is," Bob informed him. "I've got it all doped out that the girls don't go at Miss Prettyman right. You roil her, when, with a little forethought, you'd be able to smooth her down and have her eating out of your hand."

"Hickory nuts, I suppose," said Betty resentfully.

"Sure!" returned the grinning Bob. "Diplomacy, my child, is what you lack. See if my scheme doesn't work out to a happy ending. Where's the bag for the best nuts?"

"Libbie has it," said Betty. "Why, where did she go?" she added in quick alarm. "Let's yell for her."

They shouted in concert and, to their relief, a faint hail came back to them.

"That must be Libbie. It sounded over here," said Betty, beginning to run. "There she is!"

"Why, how queer she looks—sort of stooped over!" Bobby added.

"Hello!" said Libbie restrainedly, as they came up to her.

"What made you run off?" asked Bobby, who never could keep still.

"I wanted to find the slab of stone," Libbie replied defiantly. "I know it must be somewhere on this mountain."

"Well, did you find it?" asked Gil Lane curiously.

"For pity's sake, Libbie, get up," Bobby broke in. "If you could only see how you look!"

Libbie seemed about to cry.

"I can't," she said.

"You can't what?" Bobby asked sternly.

"I can't get up!" wailed Libbie. "There's a trap under this stone, and my dress is caught in that and the stone's on top of the trap—so there!"

It is to be regretted that, in the face of Libbie's obvious distress, the boys began to laugh. After a moment the girls joined in and the woods echoed to the shouts of their laughter.

"I thought maybe this was the carved slab with Madeline's face on it, you know," poor Libbie tried to explain, when they were a little quieter. "And I pushed it up as far as I could, but when I stooped down something went click and frightened me. I jumped and the stone came down and then I couldn't get my dress out. And there are bugs and ants and snakes and beetles under there, too," she added, in misery.

"Poor Libbie, don't you care," Bob comforted her. "We're as mean as dirt to laugh at you. But you do look funny. Come on here, you laughing hyenas, and help me rescue Libbie."

Three or four boys put their shoulders against the rock and tilted it back. Sure enough, there was a trap underneath and the skirt of Libbie's cloth sport skirt was caught in the steel jaws. They pried this open, not without some damage to the material, and Libbie was free.

She stood up and shook herself as a spaniel might after a cold swim.

"Come on," she said distinctly, "let's go home."

And home they went, counting the day a success, for were not the nuts for Miss Prettyman safely stowed away under the seat?

"Though what Libbie got out of the nutting party is more than I can see," Bobby remarked a trifle sarcastically.

A few days afterward Miss Anderson stopped Betty as she was rushing madly through the halls, in frantic endeavor to get to a history recitation after a delay caused by the desire of Bobby to recite her latest grievance about Libbie.

"Betty, I want to speak to you about the play," said Miss Anderson. "I'm to coach it again this year, and we thought an operetta would be a welcome change."

"Yes'm," Betty replied. "I love 'em. Is that the second bell?"

"I'll see you this afternoon—don't get that strained expression, please, Betty," and the physical training teacher laughed. "You're too young, and nothing is important enough to give you nerves, yet. Run along, child."

Breathless, Betty slipped into her seat in Miss Martha's class. She thought that very few people understand the worries a schoolgirl had. People were always telling you that your school days were your happiest, just as though there was nothing to upset you from September to June.

"Even Miss Anderson doesn't understand," thought Betty, hastily numbering the pages of her theme for her next class, which would be English. "Bobby and Libbie make me their battleground, and Ada and Ruth seem never to lose a chance to say something disagreeable. I wonder if I can sing in the operetta?"

"The trouble with you, Betty," Miss Martha's voice broke in on her confused thoughts, "is that you don't concentrate. You sit there and dream. Can you tell me what I was speaking of a few minutes ago?"

Betty could not, and a few moments later she missed a question which Ada answered with brilliance and ease.

"Oh, dear, and I was planning to have a fine report for Uncle Dick this month," sighed Betty. "Oh, well, I can't help it, if Miss Martha is going to mark us so severely."

But when she came to discuss the operetta with Miss Anderson, Betty found that marks and reports could not be so lightly regarded.

"Mrs. Eustice refuses to let any girl have a part in the cast," Miss Anderson reported, "whose average falls below seventy-eight. And unless some of you girls show a decided reform, there won't be any cast. And Betty—"

"Yes, Miss Anderson?" Betty answered, a little puzzled at the tone.

"I must have Ada for the Princess. She can't act, but her voice is too lovely to disregard. And I wonder if you would be the Prince?"

A laugh bubbled into Betty's eyes, and Miss Anderson's face relaxed.

"I might have known you would say 'yes,' " the teacher said gratefully.

"Of course I'll be the Prince, if you ask me to," said Betty soberly. "But, Miss Anderson, won't rehearsals be rather funny?"

"I don't think so," Miss Anderson rejoined. "I believe that Ada will be so pleased to have the leading rôle that she will school her tongue and practise graciousness. In fact, I want this operetta to weld a better school spirit among the girls."

That night a meeting of the student body was called to hear the operetta read and the rôles assigned. Always before a play had been chosen for the dramatic abilities of the Shadyside girls, and the news that a musical setting would be the feature this year, was voted pleasantly thrilling.

"Of course, Ada will have the leading rôle, and it's perfectly right," the comment ran. "She has the voice, and it is trained. Of course, it is a pity she is such a poker on a stage, but you can't have everything."

The operetta was announced as "The Princess Who Wanted the Moon" and, as had been fore-

told, the rôle of the Princess was given to Ada. Betty Gordon was to play the Prince, the King and Queen were to be the Guerin girls, Norma and Alice, and the Old Witch was to be played by Libbie. The Witch's Black Cat was assigned to Bobby, who could not act any better than Ada, but who dearly loved a finger in the dramatics.

There was to be a large and tuneful chorus, and as far as possible the girls were to make their own costumes and scenery, the art departments of the school being placed in charge of this work.

"Maybe we won't make those Salsette boys sit up and take notice!" chuckled Betty. "They give a pretty good play themselves, but ours is going to be more than good this year."

As Mrs. Eustice had foreseen, the desire to appear in the operetta acted as a spur to ambition, and between the hours spent in preparation of lessons and the time required for rehearsals and costuming effort, the girls were kept wholesomely busy. They were all "crazy" about the music of their operetta and needed no reminder to report promptly for chorus rehearsals.

Madame always assisted Miss Anderson in the work of coaching, and it was her eye for color, as well as the flair for design that was the gift of the art teacher, Miss Warde, that proved invaluable in getting the right stage effects.

"I declare, this will be the prettiest thing we've

ever done, if Miss Anderson can only limber up the Princess," Bobby said, as she prepared to settle down for an evening of sedate study opposite Betty. "I can't think of anything but a wooden Indian when she pitches forward into your arms."

"She does pitch," admitted Betty, giggling at the recollection. "If I thought she wouldn't get miffed, I'd suggest that we practise that scene on the mats in the gym; then Ada wouldn't get hurt if she did fall. She's afraid of falling on the floor—that's what makes her so awkward now."

"Well, Libbie ought to take a few lessons, too," Bobby declared. "She is a good Witch, but when she comes down with her full weight on my paws, I intend to tell her about it."

"I'm going to persuade Ada to practise with me," repeated Betty. "She's anxious to make a hit, and there's no reason why any one can't learn to act."

"But I told her the gym was haunted," Bobby confessed. "I don't believe she'll go there with you."

CHAPTER XIX

ARE THERE GHOSTS?

BETTY's pen poised in midair.

"You told her the gym was haunted!" she gasped. "Why did you say a thing like that?"

"Toss me the Latin glossary, will you?" Bobby requested coolly. "Oh, I told her one day when she was teasing Mary Moore about going up in the water tower. I can't stand a girl bragging," Bobby announced, with an odd air of virtue.

Betty bent her head over her paper and wrote steadily.

"Ada said she wasn't afraid of anything," Bobby went on, "and Mary said in that meek little voice of hers, 'Not even ghosts?' Ada said there was no such thing as a ghost, so I naturally put one together for her and hid it in the gym."

"Bobby!" cried Betty, crossing out two words and blotting the page. "How much of that is true?" she asked.

"There's a ghost in the gym and it will visit Ada if she dares poke her nose in there alone,"

declared Bobby. "It's a lovely ghost. Tommy helped me make it. Wait till you see it, Betty."

"I don't want to see it, and I advise you to behave yourself if you don't want to lose your part in the operetta," Betty returned sternly.

She forgot about the ghost in the press of a busy day that followed, a day that culminated with a rehearsal of the school play.

"The stairs are made," Miss Anderson announced; "but I think we'll manage once more with the short flight from the gym. Do try to come down gracefully, Ada. So much depends on an impressive entrance."

They were rehearsing in the gymnasium and the teacher took her place at the piano while Ada poised at the top of the short flight of stairs that led to the gallery.

At the signal of a lightly sounded chord, Ada began her aria. As her lovely voice never failed to thrill the girls, practically the entire school assembled at these rehearsals, just to hear Ada sing.

"Now start to come down," called Miss Anderson. "Don't stop singing, Betty. There's your cue."

A clatter under the gallery announced that the Prince had arrived on his steed. He dismounted and came running to the foot of the stairs, where he knelt on the lowest step. The charming, sing-

ing voice came nearer. The singer thrust out a rather stiff hand, shut her eyes on a high note—and missed her footing. She came down with a crash on the astonished Prince, and both rolled over the polished floor, to bring up against the weight machines.

“Why didn’t you take my hand?” scolded Ada. “I thought, of course, you’d be right there. Oh, dear, I hope I haven’t broken my wrist!”

“It wasn’t time for you to put out your hand,” Betty protested, rubbing her bruised head. “That’s in the second act.”

“It is not!” retorted Ada. “I guess I know my part. I’ve studied it hard enough. I am to put out my hand and you are to take it and kiss it.”

“I hope she bites it!” whispered Bobby to Louise, who shook her head reprovably.

“You’re mistaken, Ada.” Miss Anderson looked up from her manuscript. “That comes in the second act. You should stop suddenly in surprise here, and the Prince looks up and waits for your greeting. Now, go through with it again.”

Betty ran off toward the gallery, but Ada sat on the lowest step and did not offer to move.

“Ada!” called Miss Anderson. “Ready?”

“I won’t do it again—not with Betty,” Ada

declared angrily. "She makes me nervous. I can't sing unless I feel comfortable."

Miss Anderson swung around on the piano bench.

"If you wish to resign your rôle, Ada, I have nothing to say," she announced crisply. "But if you intend to go on with the part, you'll have to follow my directions. Now, which do you choose?"

"Oh, I suppose I can do it," grumbled Ada, mounting the stairs.

She was desperately eager to wear the flowing velvet robes that would be the costume of the Princess, and to sing the title rôle was the height of her present ambitions. For that she would endure the slights, as she termed them, of Miss Anderson and the hateful actions of Betty Gordon.

Betty's sense of humor was almost her undoing in the repeated scene, for when Ada stopped, as directed, and stood motionless, she glared at the kneeling Prince in anything but a lovable manner.

"I mustn't laugh," thought Betty wildly. "She'll blame me for spoiling the scene again."

"Give a little cry—a faint, surprised cry," commanded Miss Anderson, "and fall into the arms of the Prince."

This was the moment when Ada always "pitched," as Bobby expressed it. Now she

opened her mouth and cried "Ow!" as though a pin had been stuck into her and staggered into the arms of the Prince who, braced for the shock, nevertheless nearly went over backward.

Miss Anderson looked discouraged, but she said nothing, and the rehearsal progressed to a peaceful close.

It was not till she was ready to do her lessons that night that Ada discovered she had left a grammar in the gymnasium.

"Ruth, don't you want to go and get my book?" Ada asked persuasively. "I'm so tired, I can't go down all those stairs again."

Ruth Gladys Royal was an obliging girl, but rooming with Ada had made her suspicious of apparently innocent requests.

"Why don't you want to go?" she countered.

"I just told you—I'm tired," said Ada.

"But the gym is so spooky with the lights turned off," Ruth objected.

"Nonsense; there's nothing to be afraid of," returned Ada. "Come in," she called, as some one tapped at the door.

Mild-mannered Laura Bennett, one of the quietest girls in the school, opened the door. Could Ada give her the assignment for the next day's French? She had copied it hastily from the board and now found herself unable to read her "notes."

"I left my paper in the grammar," Ada answered, "and the grammar is down in the gym. I was trying to get Ruth to go and get it for me, but she's afraid of spooks."

"I'll go," Laura offered, and Ruth was willing to accompany her.

Ada, left alone, drew music clefs all over her scratch paper and hummed the opening chorus of "The Princess Who Wanted the Moon" contentedly. When the door burst open and a wild-eyed and disheveled Ruth flew in, followed by Laura, panting and scarcely less panic-stricken, Ada could only stare in astonishment.

"Ghosts!" whispered Ruth hoarsely. "We saw one! In the gym!"

"It was a trick. I know it was a trick," Laura gasped, "but of course it startled us."

"I'll bet it was Bobby Littell—she told me the gym was haunted," said Ada.

Up rose Ruth Gladys Royal in righteous wrath.

"And you let me go down there!" she demanded shrilly. "Well, all I can say is—" words apparently failed her.

"Don't be silly. It isn't haunted, of course," Ada returned impatiently. "Bobby was only fooling. I'm going to go and tell her, though, what I think of a low-down trick like that."

Ruth elected to go with Ada, and they left Laura busily writing while they went down the

corridor and tapped on the door of the room occupied by Betty and Bobby.

"You want to be more careful, Bobby Littell," said Ada, as soon as they were admitted. "Your trick almost gave Ruth hysterics, and if she has a nervous breakdown, you'll be the one to blame."

Bobby's wide-eyed innocent stare was appealing.

"What are you talking about?" said she.

"About that ghost you put in the gym, of course," Ada informed her. "Ruth went back to get a book for me, and she nearly had a fit."

"Oh, it was a real ghost, I'm sure of it," poor Ruth broke in. "It had such glittering eyes. I'll never forget those eyes!"

Betty closed her book decisively.

"There is no such thing as a ghost," she said. "You know it. I thought Aunt Nancy was the only one around here who believed in ghosts."

"Aunt Nancy says there is a ha'nt out in the grounds," Ada remarked, at which Ruth buried her head under a sofa pillow.

Betty shook her head vigorously.

"All foolishness," said she. "Probably Aunt Nancy saw a tree waving its branches in the wind. Everything looks queer at night."

"And you wouldn't be afraid, if you did meet a ha'nt?" Ada persisted.

"What are you trying to do, Ada?" Bobby demanded suddenly. "Frighten Betty?"

"I'm going to pay you back for your silly trick," said Ada. "I'll dare you, Betty, to go out and pin a card on the two oaks at the foot of the driveway."

Into Betty's eyes flashed the look that Bob knew well. Her cheeks flushed.

"All right, I'll do it!" she agreed. "Give me the card, quick."

"Betty Gordon, have you lost your mind?" Bobby scolded. "It's pitch dark out, and cold, too. It's against the rules to go out without permission after dinner, and you know it as well as I do."

Betty was putting on her sweater and apparently did not hear.

"Don't be silly, Betty," pleaded Bobby.

"I dare you!" said Ada excitedly.

Betty took the card Ada handed her and snatched a long pin from the tray on her dresser. She darted to the door, opened it, and stood poised a moment on the threshold.

"If I don't come back," she cried gayly, "the ha'nt has caught me!"

Then she ran lightly down the hall.

CHAPTER XX

DETECTIVE BETTY

THE two oaks to which Ada had referred were at the foot of the driveway which skirted the back of the school. The drive was used for the tradesmen's delivery trucks and wound through a lonely part of the grounds. Betty could not repress a little shudder as she plunged into the velvety darkness.

It had been easy to leave the school unseen, for she had passed over the connecting bridge into the Administration Building and had let herself out of the front door by turning the spring catch. It was the time when the girls were doing their most consistent studying, and a blaze of lights from the study hall showed Betty that Miss Martha Nevins and her charges were still at work.

She reached the dark, towering oak trees without mishap and was reaching up to pin the card high on the trunks when something cold and wet touched her hand.

Betty was as brave as most girls and braver

than some, but she nearly screamed aloud! That something was so cold and wet and clammy!

"The—the ha'nt—" she stammered. Then a rough tongue began to lick her fingers and she knew it was no "ha'nt," but a dog.

"Why, you dear bow-wow!" she cried, trying to see him clearly. "Where on earth did you come from? Where do you live?"

The dog gave a final rough lick to her hand and dropped down on the ground. Betty heard him crunching a bone contentedly.

Now that her card was in place, Betty had the problem of getting back into the school unobserved. She thought this would be comparatively easy, but when she moved away the soft pad-pad of the dog's feet sounded close behind her.

"For pity's sake," said Betty, stopping short, "you can't follow me. Don't you know I haven't a place to keep a dog? Go home!"

The dog did not move.

"Go home, where you belong," repeated Betty, as severely as she could speak.

The dog wagged its tail. She could feel it beating against her shoes.

"I'll run," Betty decided. "Perhaps he can't run fast enough to keep up with me."

But running delighted her unwelcome companion, and he bounced along excitedly, even giving one or two short barks of pure glee and jumping

up on Betty to show her how much he liked this performance.

"You seem to think we're doing track work," giggled Betty. "But, dog, whatever you do, don't bark. Do you want the whole school to come out and find us?"

The dog sat down as soon as she stopped running and waited contentedly for her to do something else.

"I know what I'll do!" Betty's resourcefulness did not desert her. "I'll send you adrift on the lake. You won't tip over, and, if you do, all dogs can swim. Some one will pick you up in the morning, and we'll get the boat then, too. Come on, Ponto—you're due to take a voyage."

It was a long walk to the dock, but Betty knew her way perfectly and was even able to run confidently down the lawn and across the road. The blinding lights of a motor car made her crouch down in the shadow of the hedge for a moment, but the friendly darkness shut down again in an instant and Betty and the dog reached the dock undetected.

It was not the easiest task she had ever attempted—to bundle the confiding animal into the rowboat tied at the little wharf. But Betty was determined to carry out her plan and she finally had the dog comfortably stowed away with a

bone she had thoughtfully picked up for it before she quitted the back driveway.

"Be a good dog and take care of yourself," whispered Betty, pushing the boat off with a broken canoe paddle that had luckily been left under one of the canoes.

She pushed steadily and had the satisfaction of hearing the dog's teeth crunching into the bone she had provided, before the widening water carried the boat beyond the reach of her paddle.

"The girls will think something has me, for sure," thought Betty, turning to go back. "I wish Bobby had come. This is a barrel of fun."

The sense of freedom had gone to her head and she was thoroughly happy. Down the dock she darted, across the road, into the sweeping drive that led to the group of school buildings. What was that?

Betty slowed her mad pace—surely a shadowy form had crossed the driveway just ahead of her. She thought of calling out. It was Bobby, perhaps, come in search of her. But her sense of caution restrained her.

"It's too tall for Bobby," Betty decided. "Who can it be? I'm going to find out. That may be the 'ha'nt' Aunt Nancy is forever talking about."

Betty was wildly excited, but she was not frightened. She crept forward silently, unable to see the figure except when it slid, with a curious

darting movement, from tree to tree. The drive was bordered with handsome elms.

"Some one is going into the school building," Betty murmured, her eyes straining to make out the mysterious shadow moving ahead.

Loud and clear, there floated on the still night air the mournful howl of a dog—a dog deserted and betrayed. Betty wanted to laugh, for her lively imagination pictured the poor beast drifting on the placid waters of the lake and wondering how he had come to be adrift.

She glanced back hastily over her shoulder, and when she turned again the figure had vanished.

"I wonder if some one is hiding up there in the shadow of the buildings?" pondered Betty. "Or did some one go in? Well, there's nothing to do but make a guess. The door of the Administration Building is left unlocked till last, so I'll take a chance and go in there."

Breathing quickly, her cheeks crimson, Betty slipped into the hallway and walked noiselessly down the carpeted corridor and turned, intending to speed up the stairs and slip through the covered bridge into the dormitories.

She changed her plans, however, when a quick look down the other direction disclosed the slinking figure of a man walking rapidly on his tiptoes.

"It's Dave's assistant—that Towsky!" Betty identified him quickly. "Now, what in the world—"

He's going to the classrooms, I do believe! There's nothing to take him there at this time of night."

Betty was accustomed to act as quickly as she thought—Bob Henderson sometimes said she acted more quickly than she thought, but that was the result of a momentary irritation—and now she followed Towsky noiselessly. She kept out of sight until he rounded the corners just ahead, and when he stopped before the door of Miss Harriet Nevins' classroom, Betty was safely hidden in a deep niche where a water cooler stood in summer time.

The classroom doors were never locked, and all the assistant janitor had to do to gain entrance was to turn the handle of the door and go in. There was a moment, which, Betty guessed, he employed in pulling down the heavy dark shades, then the lights flashed on.

"I'm going to see what he is up to, if he shoots me on the spot," said Betty positively, and she crept up to the door.

Betty peeped in and saw Towsky standing at the teacher's desk. He was fumbling with several keys on a key ring, his face intent as he searched for the particular one he wanted. He gave a grunt of satisfaction when he found it and fitted it into the lock of the desk.

Something was wrong, for he muttered an ex-

climation as he jerked it free. He dropped to his knees and tried another key. This time the lock turned and he lifted up the lid of the desk.

Betty's eyes were on a line with the opened desk, and to her amazement she saw the man put his hand into his pocket, draw out several bills, and place them in the desk. Then he stopped to examine several notebooks, appropriated one of the several pencils, and put the lid down again softly. As he turned the key in the lock, Betty fled, running as though an army of ghosts were at her heels.

"Betty!" cried Bobby in undisguised relief, as her chum burst into the room. "You don't know how worried we've been about you! I'm so glad you've come! Are you all right?"

Betty nodded, breathless for the moment. Libbie and Frances Martin, Louise and Constance Howard, hearing Bobby's voice, came hurrying in.

"Miss Prettyman sent Ada and Ruth back to their rooms," Libbie explained. "We had a great time trying to keep her from finding you weren't in. What made you stay so long, Betty?"

Betty had dropped, a vivid heap, on the bed. She was still panting.

"Oh, girls!" Betty found her voice at last. "You'll never guess what I saw! I couldn't believe my own eyes!"

Libbie collapsed into a rocking chair!

"Then there are ghosts!" she wailed. "Aunt Nancy said so. If Betty saw a ghost, you just have to believe in them! And we heard a dog howling. That's a bad sign."

"For goodness' sake, can't you keep quiet?" Bobby demanded wrathfully. "Betty didn't see a ghost, you goose. Tell us what you did see, Betty, that's a dear."

"I saw John Towsky," said Betty clearly, "go into Miss Harriet's classroom and unlock her desk and put money in it."

The girls stared.

"Honestly?" Louise asked mechanically.

Betty briefly and rapidly outlined what she had seen since leaving the room. When she mentioned that Towsky had locked the teacher's desk again, Bobby sprang to her feet.

"That settles it," she cried. "He's trying to get Miss Harriet in wrong. Let's go down and tell Mrs. Eustice everything you saw, Betty."

"That would be nice for Betty, wouldn't it?" Libbie said scornfully. "How is she going to explain being out after dark?"

CHAPTER XXI

HONEST CONFESSION

BOBBY was instantly contrite.

"I never thought of that, Betty," she said apologetically. "Of course you can't tell Mrs. Eustice. She would be furious."

But the reaction had set in for Betty.

"It was a silly thing to do—to take that dare," she confessed. "And we will, too, go and tell Mrs. Eustice. If I let John Towsky succeed with his tricks simply because I'm afraid of getting into trouble, what kind of person does that make me? Come on, Bobby, before I lose my courage."

"We'll come, too," said Libbie and Constance, and Louise and Frances asserted that they meant to lend their support.

"Don't drag Ada or Ruth into this," commanded Betty, as they approached the door of the principal's sitting room, which was on the floor below the rooms of the girls.

Betty knocked and the well-known voice called: "Yes? Come in."

Mrs. Eustice looked surprised when she saw the six girls. She had been reading and was seated in a low chair before a grate fire. She wore some kind of negligée of black satin, edged with white fur, and, as she rose, she looked very lovely and also very stately and "generalesque"—the word was Bobby's.

"Is anything wrong?" the principal asked, turning on a center light and surveying the girls gravely.

"Yes, Mrs. Eustice—at least we think so," Betty said, with some hesitation. "We thought we ought to come and tell you that—about—it's rather important, we're sure," she ended.

"Suppose you sit down here and be comfortable." Mrs. Eustice indicated the davenport drawn near the fire. "Now, Betty," she said, after they had seated themselves, "what is this you have to tell me?"

Betty looked at the fire.

"I saw John Towsky—the assistant janitor, you know—unlock Miss Harriet Nevins' desk and put something into it, Mrs. Eustice," she said. "Money, I think. And then he locked the desk up again."

"Miss Harriet's desk?" the principal repeated. "You mean the desk in her schoolroom? But what were you doing there to-night, Betty?"

"It was during study hours," Betty admitted,

with flaming cheeks. "I—I came in from outdoors and happened to see him sneaking through the corridors."

"And you followed him and watched him?" prompted Mrs. Eustice.

"Yes," said Betty. "I saw him open the desk and put the money in and then lock it up."

"Did he see you?"

"No, I'm sure he didn't," Betty answered. "I turned and ran before he had time to put out the lights. Oh, I hope he didn't see me!" she added, with a little shiver of fear.

Mrs. Eustice nodded soberly.

"It is extremely doubtful that he saw you," she said slowly. "And now I am going to ask you girls to do a difficult thing. I want you to keep this knowledge to yourselves. Don't discuss it with any one. I shall make an investigation at once, and you will not have long to wait."

The girls promised solemnly not to talk, and Bobby was wondering if they could not go—she was beginning to feel sleepy—when Mrs. Eustice turned to Betty.

"What were you doing outdoors after dinner?" she asked bluntly. "Had Miss Martha Nevins given you permission, Betty?"

Betty shook her head.

"No one gave me permission," she said bravely. "I—I just went out."

"She went on a dare, Mrs. Eustice," Bobby chimed in. "Betty just can't take a dare, and A—the girl knew it."

"So that was it?" said Mrs. Eustice. "Betty can't take a dare? Why, what a foolish little Betty she is, after all."

Betty felt very foolish indeed when, with a few skillful questions, Mrs. Eustice drew the whole story from her. A silly escapade, the whole affair, when told calmly and dispassionately.

"I heard that dog howling," Mrs. Eustice said, a smile hovering around her mouth. "I must say, Betty, that you don't lack initiative. And no one saw you go out or come in?"

"No," whispered Betty, eyes on the fire, "no one."

"Then, if you had not come to me to tell me about this John Towsky, we should not have known that you were wandering around Shady-side, giving dogs boat rides?" said the principal, and now her eyes were frankly laughing. "I think, Betty, it took some courage to come to me and tell me what you have."

Betty raised her head and her eyes met the principal's.

"I had to come," she said simply.

"Yes, you would have to," Mrs. Eustice agreed. "But we'll let the confession balance the sin this

time. That is, if you think that in the future you'll be able to ignore a dare, Betty?"

"I'll try," said Betty, half afraid to promise.

"Then away to bed and to sleep, all of you. And mind you show me how well girls can keep a secret," and Mrs. Eustice dismissed them.

Mrs. Eustice took the assembly in her usual calm manner the next morning. Her glance rested lightly on the six girls who had visited her the night before, but she read the notices and announced changes in schedules as though nothing had happened.

"I wonder if Miss Harriet has opened her desk this morning?" whispered Bobby to Betty, as they went down the hall to the classroom where first period Latin would claim them.

And six pairs of eyes were utterly unable to keep away from the teacher's desk on the low platform. Betty felt as though her own were glued to it, and it was with relief that she saw Miss Harriet bustle in to take the class.

"She hasn't opened it!" the girls in the secret telegraphed silently to Betty, as the teacher took a key ring from her pocket, fitted a key in the lock and lifted the lid deliberately.

"Corrine, raise that window, will you?" she directed one of the girls. "I think—" She stopped so suddenly that she focused the atten-

tion of the class more effectively than if she had snapped "Attention!"

The teacher's face was startlingly white and the scars stood out lividly. In her hand she held some bills—one with the corner cut across, another with a large blot of red ink showing plainly on its face. She stood there, holding the money helplessly, staring at the class who stared back mutely.

"Ada!" screamed Ruth Gladys Royal in an hysterical voice. "Ada! Look! Isn't that your money—the bill you lost?"

"I knew it!" Ada cried. "I knew it! I said all along, she took it. And that's the five dollar bill Violet Canby lost! See, Violet, didn't I tell you?"

Betty sprang to her feet, her face flaming. Bobby began to pound on her desk in an effort to be heard. All the girls were talking at once, arguing, accusing, defending. In the midst of the uproar, some one said "Sh!" A sudden hush took the place of the clamor.

Mrs. Eustice closed the door quietly behind her.

CHAPTER XXII

THE PLAIN TRUTH

"I WILL ask you to take your own seats, please," said the principal coldly.

With cheeks still flushed and eyes glittering, the girls dropped into their places. Bobby wrapped a handkerchief tenderly around her knuckles, skinned in the cause of justice, as she afterward confided to Tommy Tucker.

"What is the trouble, Miss Nevins?" asked Mrs. Eustice, turning to the teacher, who still stood behind her desk.

As in a daze, Miss Harriet placed a chair for the principal, who seated herself composedly on the platform.

"What is it?" she repeated, and now her voice held only good will.

"I don't know," Miss Harriet Nevins stammered. "I opened my desk this morning, Mrs. Eustice, and I found this in it!"

She flung the bills from her, sat down suddenly and burst into tears.

The abashed class stirred uneasily. They saw

Mrs. Eustice pat the shaking shoulders gently, tuck her own handkerchief into the clenched fingers, then the principal arose and faced them.

"I didn't understand your remarks, Ada, as I entered the room," she said curtly. "You were repeating, 'I knew it! I knew it!' Just what did you mean?"

"That twenty dollar bill is mine, Mrs. Eustice!" Ada cried eagerly. "I know it, because the corner is cut across. And that five dollars belongs to Violet. She remembers the bill that she had stolen from her had a blot of red ink on it. That's the money that was stolen when you were away."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Eustice. "Whom do you suspect of stealing it?"

Ada's glib tongue faltered. Miss Harriet had dried her eyes and was gazing directly at her.

"Ada thinks I stole her money, Mrs. Eustice," said the teacher. "She said so."

"Ada will wish to ask your pardon, then," the principal returned. "I am glad to be able to name the thief to you, Ada, since you seem to make so many serious mistakes. John Towsky took your money and also the valuables the other girls lost."

"John Towsky!" Ada repeated dully. "John Towsky!"

"The assistant janitor," said Mrs. Eustice.

"Betty Gordon saw him acting suspiciously in the corridor last night, and she followed him. She saw him open Miss Nevins' desk—evidently with a skeleton key—and place money inside. Betty came to me at once, to tell me what she had seen, and I counseled silence because I wished to make a further investigation."

Ada stared dumbly and the rest of the class waited breathlessly. It was evident that there was more to be told.

"For some time past—ever since my return—" continued Mrs. Eustice, "the teachers have been missing money and jewelry. There was evidence that the office safe had on one occasion been tampered with. I had a talk with Dave McGuire last night, and I am quite convinced that John Towsky is the thief. Before this period is over, I think he will be in custody. Please go on with the lesson as usual, Miss Nevins," she said, as she turned to leave the room.

"I never saw any one arrested!" whispered Bobby, wildly excited. "I'd give anything to see them arrest John Towsky."

"Well, I'm thankful I haven't such a morbid mind," Betty returned. "No wonder Mrs. Eustice didn't do anything about the first robbery if she has been tracing later ones among the teachers. I wonder if Miss Anderson was robbed

of her platinum watch? She hasn't worn it for a week, but I supposed it was being repaired."

By this time Miss Harriet Nevins had herself well in hand and proceeded with the recitations.

"Stop him!" a hoarse voice suddenly bellowed through the hall. "George, head him off—quick!"

"You may get your wish after all!" Betty whispered, as Bobby, who had been so anxious to see the assistant janitor arrested, actually turned pale.

"George!" shouted the voice again, and the girls recognized Dave McGuire's tones. "George! which way did he go?"

Somewhere a door banged—some one shrieked—there was a crash—and the girls rushed to the windows in time to see three struggling figures roll down the steps of the building they were in. John Towsky landed on the gravel, with Dave and George, the chauffeur, on top of him.

"The next time you try to get away," admonished Dave, in tones that carried far and wide, "don't let me see you start running when I'm coming around the corner, me lad."

The crestfallen Towsky was hauled to his feet and slunk away dejectedly between his captors. The girls learned afterward that Mrs. Eustice had sworn out a warrant for him and that George and the constable, who had served it, took

him directly to the jail in Edentown. Dave had brought down Towsky's bag which the constable had found ready packed in his room and a hasty search of his effects revealed an envelope of pawn tickets, several of the trinkets the girls had lost, and Miss Anderson's valuable watch.

"They have a lot of pawn tickets," declared Bobby. "Must be for the other things he took."

"Oh, I hope one of the tickets is for my wrist watch!" cried Betty. "Then maybe I'll get it back!"

"You'll have to wait to find out," said Libbie.

"And now," said Betty gleefully at noon time, "I do hope those sillies who would have it that Miss Harriet or Miss Martha stole their things, are satisfied."

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say they're satisfied," Bobby returned. "Ada, especially, looks far from downright happy and contented."

"Isn't it great, Bob?" bubbled Betty, when he and Tommy came over to Shadyside on Saturday afternoon. "Isn't it simply wonderful? We've killed two stones with one bird—I mean the other way around, of course. That dreadful Towsky man is gone and every one knows that poor Miss Harriet had nothing to do with the thefts."

"If I were Miss Harriet, I'd go teach the heathen in some nice place," Tommy Tucker ob-

served. "The heart of Africa where they eat you, when peeved, couldn't seem any worse to her after her experiences here. Some heartless bunch, you are!"

"We are not!" Bobby rushed to the defense of her friends. "We can't help it, if some of us make mistakes. I heard all about how horrid you were to that new cadet, Tommy Tucker."

Tommy looked uncomfortable.

"Bob stuck up for him," he submitted. "We razzed him pretty hard, too, but Bob wouldn't desert the kid. Roland Rice was about ready to have Bob dropped from the class society, too, but the kid made good just in time."

"Did Ada apologize to Miss Harriet?" Bob asked, in order to change the subject.

"I think she did, though I'm not sure," Betty replied. "The girls who signed that first petition and those who lost things in the robbery are keeping so still we don't know what to think. Either they have asked pardon of Miss Harriet, or they are so ashamed of their suspicions they're subdued for the time being. I don't see how Ada can face Miss Harriet, unless she does apologize. She kept shouting at her, 'I knew it! I knew it!' "

The girls walked down to the dock with the two boys, and Bob purposely let Bobby and Tommy go ahead.

"I've been wondering, Betty," Bob said in a low tone, "if you'll have to appear against that Towsky chap. I hate to think of you being mixed up in the case."

"Mrs. Eustice spoke about that, too," said Betty. "She said her lawyer told her that he wouldn't have to call any witnesses. Towsky has confessed and told about two or three other places he robbed."

Betty and Bobby left the boys at the dock and were walking back to the school when they met the school bus, bound for the afternoon mail. Miss Anderson was going to town, and she invited the two girls to go with her, an invitation they gladly accepted. Edentown, as Bobby observed, wasn't a large place, but it was some place. At the post-office George took in the school pouch and brought it out in a few minutes well-filled.

"Letter for you, Miss Betty," he said, handing a white square to Betty. "It was on top, so I thought you might as well have it ahead of time."

CHAPTER XXIII

BAD NEWS

BETTY was nothing, if not feminine. While Bobby watched her, she took that letter and tried to read the postmark, turning it this way and that. Then she looked at the back to see if a return address might afford her a clew as to the sender. Failing that, she held it up to the light.

"I wonder who it's from?" she said slowly.

"Good grief!" Bobby cried, borrowing the boys' expression, "why don't you open it and find out? It's probably from your Uncle Dick."

George had gone to the hardware store on an errand and Miss Anderson was busy in another shop. Betty and Bobby had the bus to themselves.

"I guess I know Uncle Dick's handwriting," retorted Betty indignantly. "I never saw this writing before."

"Maybe it's from mother," Bobby said. "Or from Mrs. Guerin."

"I said that I never saw this writing before," repeated Betty.

Bobby's patience, never long-suffering, was rapidly evaporating, and only the appearance of Miss Anderson in the door of the shop saved her from an explosion.

"Girls!" the teacher called, "come in here and see what you think of this stuff for the chorus costumes. It seems to be the shade we want."

Betty put her letter in her purse, and for the next hour examined and discussed fabrics and colors to be used in the school operetta.

"My one hope is that I don't suffocate in that cat costume," confided Bobby, when they were bouncing on their homeward way, George possessing a peculiar gift for finding the worst parts of the road and failing to avoid them.

"You look so cunning," Betty consoled her. "Just like a cat, Bobby. And Libbie makes a good witch, too."

"She doesn't put much life into her part yet, but I think she's better than she was," said Bobby. "Anyway, if Ada doesn't take cold, I don't see how the thing can fail to succeed. I admit that girl can sing."

Miss Anderson smiled above her lapful of bundles.

"I think our audience is going to be surprised at the number of good voices," she observed. "Cer-

tainly, I never gave the music department credit enough for its training."

Betty had intended to read her letter as soon as she reached the school, but she and Bobby found a group around the bulletin board in the hall and stopped to learn the news.

"What do you think?" gasped Alice Guerin, her eyes wide with dismay. "Ada Nansen has dropped to sixty in three subjects and she's barred from the operetta!"

"Let me see," demanded Betty, pushing her way to the board.

Sure enough, there was a list of names neatly typewritten by Miss Prettyman. Half a dozen girls were forbidden to take part in "dramatics or athletics" until such time as their scholarship should be brought up to requirements. Libbie Littell was on the list, having taken a downward slant in her reports for Latin and mathematics.

"Ada is furious!" Edith Ames said importantly. "She blames Miss Harriet and Miss Martha, too. She says they are trying to pay her back and don't want her to have the leading rôle in the play. They've flunked her in Latin and history, you see."

"Well, she's failed in French," pointed out Betty. "Surely she can't think Madame has a grudge against her?"

"She thinks Madame wants you to take the rôle," Edith replied innocently.

Betty stared and Bobby leaned up against Alice, pretending need for support.

"I?" gasped Betty. "Why, I couldn't take that part, if I wanted it. I can't sing well enough! Ada has the finest voice we ever heard at Shadyside, and no one has disputed it, least of all Madame."

"Ada can't act," ventured Jessie Wood. "Madame knows you're our best actress, and some of the girls say good acting is more important than singing."

"Then some of the girls are utter idiots!" Betty retorted with vigor. "Miss Anderson assigned the parts, and you ought to be ashamed to listen to any silly gossip. Where is Ada?"

"Gone to bed with a sick headache," Edith reported. "She cried all the afternoon, and Ruth says Miss Harriet has killed her."

Betty brushed past the group around the bulletin board and went upstairs to her room, followed by a singularly silent Bobby and an equally contemplative Alice.

"This," announced Betty, when she had gained her castle, "is a kettle of fish!"

"You will have to take the leading rôle, won't you, Betty?" suggested Alice diffidently.

"I most certainly will not—cannot," Betty answered. "But I have a much harder job ahead

of me, and I don't know whether I can swing it or not."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bobby, with lively curiosity.

"Coach Ada in Latin," replied Betty. "You are to tutor her in history and Libbie shall take her in French. Thank goodness, Libbie is a shark at French."

"Oh, Betty, that's nonsense," Bobby protested. "We have all we can do now, to keep up our own averages. Besides, Libbie is disqualified herself."

"This operetta is the best thing we've ever done—all the girls say so," said Betty stubbornly. "I won't have it fail when we're so near the end. Ada has to have the lead because of her wonderful singing, and it's up to us to pull her through."

"I'll help Libbie with her Latin and math," promised Alice. "But, Betty, by the time they work off their poor marks, it will be too late. Have you thought of that?"

"I'm going to Mrs. Eustice," explained Betty feverishly, "and ask her to let all the girls go on with rehearsals as usual. Then I'll promise her that their recitations will be high right straight along and that they'll pass the monthly tests."

"How do you know they will?" demanded

Bobby. "I can't make Ada learn if she makes up her mind to be dumb."

"She'll study—she is crazy to be in the play," Betty said confidently. "We'll coach and *coach* and COACH. I know we can do it! But it means a lot of extra work, of course."

"It's all right for me. Libbie is a tractable lamb and I have only a small speaking part in the operetta," said Alice. "But, Betty, you are working your head off as it is; and Ada won't be very easy to teach, as Bobby says."

"I won't give up!" declared Betty. "We'll all do our share, and we can manage it. I'll have a class here in our room every night, and Bobby and I will do our studying in the afternoon, after rehearsal."

It was impossible not to be infected with such determination, and before Betty set off to interview Mrs. Eustice, Bobby and Alice had promised to help her in every way. Bobby, in spite of her impatience, was capable of making many puzzling questions clear and history was her pet subject. Libbie, of course, could be depended upon to do her share.

Mrs. Eustice listened without comment to the plan as outlined by Betty and, at the conclusion, assented promptly.

"I cannot release the girls from classroom obligations, much as I may be inclined to be

lenient, in view of their interest in the play," said the principal. "They had full warning, and the fact that only six of them have dropped in their averages proves that I did not make unfair exactions."

"They're the six we need most in the operetta," Betty explained.

"It usually is the six who are needed most, I believe," replied Mrs. Eustice, smiling slightly. "However, Betty, I think, with you, that coaching will bring them through. I am quite willing to test your plan. The only change I wish to make is in the matter of holding the class. You and Bobby must spend some time outdoors after each rehearsal. Give one hour to the girls you are helping—that should be ample—and then you will have time to exercise in the air."

There remained the difficult task of "telling Ada." Bobby flatly refused to accompany Betty on this errand, and Alice looked so unhappy at the suggestion that Betty hastily decided it would be better to go alone. She found Ada stretched pathetically on her bed, the loyal Ruth Gladys beside her, bathing her temples with cologne from a silver bottle.

"I suppose you've seen the bulletin board," groaned Ada. "Those hateful Nevins teachers can't let me alone. They'd like to see me leave

the school, but I won't give them that satisfaction."

"I wouldn't, either," murmured Ruth Gladys indignantly.

Betty had wisely resolved not to discuss this question.

"Ada," she began quickly, "we girls have been talking things over and we simply cannot let the operetta fall through. And without you it won't be anything at all."

"Oh, some one else can sing it, I guess," Ada said, but she did not sound convincing.

"No one can sing it as you can," declared Betty, with winning sincerity. "And, Ada, if you will let us, we'll arrange things so you can go on with rehearsals. We'll all help, and you can still be the Princess."

Ada sat up on the bed and drew her pink satin negligée over her shoulders.

"How can you fix it?" she asked eagerly. "I've flunked in three subjects—that is, my averages were marked down, but I'm positive I recited every time I was called on. I can't help it if I'm not asked to recite, can I?"

Betty proceeded quickly to give the details of her plan. Ada and Ruth listened absorbedly, but were not enthusiastic.

"I hate to study," said Ada discontentedly. "It's enough work to learn the songs for the

operetta, without being pinned down to lessons."

"If you don't make up your points, you'll be dropped from the cast," Betty warned her. "You can't even attend the next rehearsal unless you convince Mrs. Eustice that you are trying to gain your lost ground."

"And that is such a lovely dress for the Princess," mused Ruth enviously. "The boys from Salsette have taken four rows in the orchestra, too."

An overwhelming vision of what it would mean to her not to have the leading rôle, swept over Ada.

"I'll study!" she cried, in a sudden panic. "Help me, Betty, and I will try to do my best. Miss Harriet hurries me so, half the time I don't understand what she wants the class to do."

"Half past three, in our room," said Betty capably, "to-morrow afternoon."

Searching for a stamp in her purse after dinner that night, Betty found her letter, still unopened. She slit it with a hairpin and glanced at the contents.

"Well, for pity's sake!" cried the astonished Bobby, "did some one leave you a fortune?"

CHAPTER XXIV

GOOD NEWS

"No WONDER I couldn't guess it was from her," said Betty.

Bobby rolled her eyes ceilingward. "Give me patience," she begged of the chandelier.

"She never wrote to me before," went on the enraptured Betty. "I didn't give her my address! And now she has found it out in the queerest way!"

"Lots of things are queer," Bobby asserted dispassionately. "People are queer, too."

"You'll never guess, if you try from now till to-morrow morning," said Betty.

Bobby flew at her chum and shook her gently.

"Look here, Betty Gordon, if you don't stop baiting me like this, I declare I'll duck you under the cold water faucet!" she cried. "Either tell me what is in that silly letter, or don't mention it to me again."

"It isn't a silly letter," protested Betty. "It's from Cincinnati, and Mrs. Pendleton wrote it."

"Who's Mrs. Pendleton?" Bobby demanded.

"You know who she is. I told you when I first got back to school," said Betty. "She's the widow with the three girls, and their railroad tickets blew out of the train window."

"Oh, yes! And you picked them up!" recalled Bobby. "Well?"

"This is too exciting for words!" bubbled Betty, who was reading the letter for the second time. "Where are the girls? I'll have to tell them."

"I'll go get them," offered Bobby, beginning to feel excited herself. "They're in the Guerins' room. Alice has a new way of making an apron so that it looks like a collar and cuff set."

Bobby, who disdained "fancy work" of any kind, rushed off to break up the needleworkers' conference, and in a few minutes was back, followed by the faithful six whose interest could always be depended upon as far as Betty was concerned.

"I have some wonderful news!" Betty greeted them. "You'll be tickled when you hear it. A letter came to-day from Mrs. Pendleton."

"Mrs. Pendleton?" chorused three or four voices doubtfully.

"Yes—you know. She's the woman who was traveling with three children and her railroad tickets blew out of the window," Betty explained,

having told the story at length and in detail to all her friends several times.

"And they had dinner with you and Uncle Dick at the restaurant in town," said Louise.

"And they were going to Cincinnati to live with the mother's Aunt Louise Esther," Libbie prompted.

"Yes, that's right. You have a good memory, Libbie," replied Betty approvingly.

"I remembered it, because she has the same names as our Louise and Esther," Libbie explained modestly.

"For goodness' sake, stop throwing bouquets and let's hear the news," begged Bobby. "I thought Betty had been left a fortune, the way she looked."

"I haven't, but Miss Harriet has!" Betty said quietly.

"Miss Harriet?" stammered Bobby. "You don't mean Miss Harriet Nevins?"

"I certainly do!" and Betty nodded vigorously.

"A fortune?" persisted Alice Guerin incredulously.

"Well, not a million dollars," Betty admitted. "But five thousand—and that amount is worth saying 'thank you' for."

"But what has Mrs. Pendleton to do with it?" asked Alice's sister, Norma.

"Don't tell me Mrs. Pendleton died and they found a teapot full of money," Louise said.

"Mrs. Pendleton isn't dead. She's very much alive," Betty answered, enjoying the mystification of the girls.

Even Bobby was puzzled.

"Didn't anybody die?" she asked, and her disappointed tone almost convulsed Betty.

"Aunt Louise Esther died," Betty confided, taking pity on her chums. "The old lady left her house and twenty thousand dollars in cash to Mrs. Pendleton. And that good soul is going to send our Miss Harriet five thousand dollars at once; in fact, I suppose it is on the way now."

Bobby blinked rapidly.

"Didn't know she knew Miss Harriet," she murmured. "What made her pick her out for a present? I think that's a lot of money to give away at one time."

"That is how Mrs. Pendleton found out where I was," said Betty. "Miss Harriet happened to mention my name in one of her letters."

"But she didn't send you five thousand dollars," Bobby pointed out.

"Betty, don't tease. Why does Miss Harriet get the money?" Alice asked.

Betty stood up and flung out her arms.

"Because, my little ones," she exclaimed joyously, "the children Miss Harriet saved in that

burning house—you remember the story Mrs. Eustice told us—were Rose and Mary and Pearl Pendleton!”

Bobby dived over among the pillows of the bed and beat an ecstatic tattoo on the comforter with her feet.

“Hurrah for Miss Harriet!” she shrieked. “Hurrah for Mrs. Pendleton! She’s a brick!”

A firm knock sounded on the door.

“Girls, you are making entirely too much noise,” said Miss Martha, looking in reproachfully at them. “Bobby, I do wish you would learn not to sit on the bed.”

Bobby slid meekly to the floor.

“I had a letter from Mrs. Laurene Pendleton, Miss Martha,” said Betty, a little diffidently. “She spoke about Miss Harriet.”

Miss Martha’s face brightened.

“I didn’t know you knew her,” she said eagerly.

“Yes, I know her,” answered Betty, and told of the recovered railroad tickets and the dinner at the restaurant afterwards. “She wrote to me about her inheritance and of sending a fourth of it to your sister. It was glorious of her to do it, I think.”

“It was, indeed. The check for five thousand dollars came this morning. My sister can

scarcely believe her good fortune." And after a few words more Miss Martha Nevins left.

"What do you suppose Miss Harriet will do with the money?" speculated Bobby, when Miss Martha had hurried away.

"Go around the world," Libbie ventured. "That's what I'd do."

"How silly you are!" said Bobby, as usual feeling it her duty to squelch her younger cousin. "She ought to put that five thousand in the bank and save it for her old age."

"Why don't you go and tell Mrs. Eustice, Betty?" urged Norma Guerin. "She'll like to hear about Mrs. Pendleton; and you know Miss Harriet—she leaves out all the interesting details."

Betty did tell Mrs. Eustice the good news, and it spread rapidly throughout the school. The majority of the girls had no very clear idea of the possibilities or limitations of the sum of five thousand dollars, and they, in imagination, spent Miss Harriet's little fortune many times over. The popular consensus of opinion was that she ought to buy herself and her sister a complete and modish wardrobe and take dancing lessons!

"Then," outlined Ada Nansen, "having gained social poise, Miss Harriet ought to live abroad for two or three years and perfect herself in

languages. After that, if she didn't care to teach, she might write."

But Miss Harriet, usually so colorless in her opinions and views, displayed no indecision in regard to her first inheritance. She insisted that it must be divided into two portions and, despite vehement protests from Miss Martha, be banked half in her sister's name and half in her own.

"You can't move Harriet, once she makes up her mind," said Miss Martha to Miss Anderson. "I'm only thankful I've been able to influence her in one direction; she is going to that wonderful hospital in Brunner and have a specialist treat the scars on her face and hands. They told her a year ago that they can guarantee her at least seventy-five per cent improvement."

"And I think it is the wisest thing she can possibly do," Miss Anderson commented, repeating this decision to Betty. "She will be a far happier woman if some of the scars can be removed from her face. I believe she is going at once, so she can be back before the holidays."

"Then," said the practical Betty, "if Mrs. Eustice is going to take the Latin classes, I'll have to coach over-time. I can't have Ada flunking directly to the principal."

More than once in the hectic week which followed did Betty regret her offer to pull Ada and the other delinquents through the mire of their

despair. She found it not the easiest task in the world to keep the girls to their tasks and drill them constantly in addition to learning her own lessons, practicing her part in the operetta, and lending a hand with the costumes and scenery.

One thing, however, happened to brighten Betty's horizon during those busy days. One morning Mrs. Eustice called her into the office and held out something in her thin, shapely hand. It was Betty's wrist watch!

"Oh," cried the girl, and for the moment could not speak.

"It was recovered by the detective on one of the pawn tickets taken from Towsky's hand-bag," said the principal. "It seems to be in perfect running order."

"How glad I am!" cried Betty, and fairly hugged the timepiece. "I was afraid it might be gone forever."

"We have recovered all of the jewelry," said Mrs. Eustice. "The money, of course, is gone—that is, the greater part of it. But the pupils and teachers will lose nothing, as the school will make all losses good." And then Betty was dismissed, to run off to the other girls and proclaim her good fortune. There was general rejoicing when the other jewelry came back.

Miss Harriet Nevins had gone immediately to the hospital and was cheerfully enduring pain and

enforced idleness, while Mrs. Eustice took charge of her classes in Latin. Betty had a horror of any of her "pupils" failing in this study, and she exerted all her will power and talent to line them up properly prepared. Libbie patiently coached Ada in French and was in turn tutored in Latin and mathematics intelligently by Alice Guerin. Bobby did her best to "cram" history into Ada, and as that young person really tried her best to learn, her averages gradually crept up to the desired mark.

But Betty was thankful when the day for the operetta arrived and it was too late to make any changes in the cast. After a last long and exacting dress rehearsal, she put on her heavy coat and hat and tramped off alone, choosing the drive around the lake, because she liked to breast the stiff wind.

"'Lo, Betsey!" called some one gaily, and Bob Henderson's glowing face looked up at her from a rowboat.

"If it gets much colder, we'll have skating!" he said cheerfully. "Want to come for a little row?"

Betty shook her head.

"I'd like to lie down and sleep for a year," she returned. "Or at least till the operetta is over."

"I knew it!" Bob scolded. "I told Tommy

they were letting you do too much. As if your own school work and your part in the play wasn't enough, you must go to coaching that chump of an Ada Nansen and sewing on the scarfs Bobby promised to finish and then let slide! To say nothing of trying to keep Ada from getting up-stage and Libbie and Bobbie from disgracing themselves by scrapping in the middle of the operetta! I don't wonder you're tired, Betty; it's a wonder to me you're not in the infirmary."

"How did you know about the scarfs?" demanded Betty, ignoring the rest of his canny speech.

"Secret service," Bob assured her. "Don't think you girls can get away with anything we don't wish you to."

"Bobby told Tommy and he told you," guessed Betty deftly. "That's easy. You're surely coming to-night, aren't you, Bob?"

"We'll all be present or accounted for," he promised her. "Roland Rice says you're the best actress Shadyside has, and while I gasp at his nerve I do admire his taste."

"Betty!" cried Bobby, running down the road hatless, "do hurry! The loveliest flowers have come for you—by express."

CHAPTER XXV

BETTY DOES SOME WELDING

IF THERE was one thing that "thrilled" Betty it was a long white box from the florist's in the city. And when she opened this and found a great sheaf of crimson roses, how her eyes did sparkle!

"Only the reddest of red roses for my Betty-girl, with all my love and applause for her to-night!" read the card.

"Uncle Dick sent them," said Betty happily. "What's in the other box?"

"We didn't open that," Bobby explained. "The lid was almost off this and we couldn't help seeing the roses. But I ran to get you before any one smelled 'em."

Betty laughed and the girls who had shared her school joys and troubles for nearly two years crowded closer to watch her open the second box.

"Bouquets!" cried Bobby.

"One for each," Betty said, hastily reading the cards. "Aren't they pretty? Here, Louise! And, Libbie. And, Connie, here's yours. Bobby and Alice and Norma. And this is yours, Frances.

Oh, I have one, too! Well, if Uncle Dick isn't a dear!"

The bouquets were made up with frills of lace paper and were faithful copies of the old-fashioned nosegays that had probably delighted Betty's grandmother in her young days. The girls fled to Aunt Nancy to ask her to put them in the ice-box till after the operetta when Mrs. Eustice had promised there should be dancing in the gymnasium. Betty put her roses in a vase and their fragrance filled the room. Libbie insisted that all the doors of the unit be left open, because she was sure that the odor of roses would penetrate to the furthest corner of the suite.

"I'm so nervous, I could enjoy a scrap," said Bobby, rushing up from dinner to get the black silk stockings that went with her cat costume.

"I *was* fidgety, but I feel all right now," Betty declared serenely.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were shining, but the tired feeling had left her, and instead she was elated, gloriously excited and happily sure of herself. She knew that she would not break down in her rôle.

"You make such a darling young prince," observed Bobby, surveying her chum with manifest approval when Betty was dressed. "Wouldn't you like to be a boy, Betty? You could wear knickers all the time and have such fun!"

"I don't know whether I'd like it or not," Betty returned, giving an extra pat to her shining dark hair. "I have fun being a girl. I don't believe I'd want to be a boy for keeps."

"Certainly not!" said Miss Anderson, with decision. "There is nothing nicer to be than a girl—you take my word for it. In this day and age a girl has no excuse for envying the masculine sex. You'd better be thankful for your bushel o' blessing."

Miss Anderson was flying from room to room, helping the girls with their costumes. It was requiring a great deal of running upstairs and down and much slamming of doors to get Ada properly dressed. If she had been a real princess, grumbled Bobby, she couldn't have expected more attendance. No amount of powder and grease paint and red velvet drapery could make Ada beautiful—her little, thin face was too sallow and her expression too discontented for that—but her frock was gorgeous and her jewelry, from the rope of pearl beads to the low rhinestone crown that twinkled in her hair, was satisfying in the extreme.

"Betty is a dream and Ada looks like a million dollars," Libbie summed up. "How does my hair look, girls?"

The pride of Libbie's heart was her wig of long white horse hair which streamed over her

shoulders and transformed her into a plump little old witch. Betty assured her that no one would ever guess she was thirteen years old, and that pleased Libbie more than any flowery speech could have touched her.

"I hope I don't melt," sighed Bobby, as Miss Anderson buttoned her into the cat costume, a black flannel affair with touches of caracul to give the illusion of fur.

"It won't button on the head, but whatever you do, don't lose it," the teacher cautioned. "Come, girls, we're going down now."

Behind the scenes, before the curtain was raised, there was all the dear, hilarious excitement that goes with every school play. Bobby stationed herself at the peephole, reporting that Mrs. Eustice, wearing a new gown, sat in the row of seats reserved for the faculty; that the cadets from Salsette, looking very handsome and soldierly in their dress uniforms, were filing in; that the orchestra were taking their places.

The overture was played, then the curtain rose and the tuneful operetta of "The Princess Who Wanted the Moon" offered its musical opening chorus to an admiring audience. The first act went with fair smoothness, except that Ada *would* fall "like a wooden barber pole," to quote Bobby, into the arms of her Prince. But Ada did her best to be graceful, having for once a most lively

sense of gratitude toward Betty, who had made it possible for her to know the intoxicating joy of being "leading lady."

Libbie and Bobby were not to appear till the second act, and Libbie was on the stage when it opened. She sat by the fire, watching a huge black cauldron. After an aria—so finely sung that Ada was recalled twice—the cue was given for Bobby, but no black cat ambled balefully out. Betty, nearest the wings, grasped the situation first.

"She has—she has—she has lost her head!" she warbled to the astonished Ada and Libbie, while the orchestra played the page over. "Her cat head—you know, the head to her costume!"

Bob, who listened intently to every word Betty spoke or sang, caught enough to guess what she was singing now. He grinned and leaned forward in his seat.

Libbie was rapidly being reduced to tears and Ada's look of distress was communicating itself to the audience, when out gamboled a queer creature with a smothered "Meow!" To the amazement and horror of the auditorium, this odd animal made straight for the fire and would have walked into the cauldron, if the Prince had not put out a kindly hand and held it back.

"My head's on backward!" hissed Bobby. "I can't see a thing!"

And so, to her natural handicap of awkwardness—Bobby was totally without stage presence—was added that of blindness, for the nervous Louise, who had found the missing cat's head under the table, had buttoned it over her sister in addled haste and placed it wrong side before.

The audience rocked with laughter every time Bobby stirred—her grinning cat face looking one way and her body moving in another—but Betty kept steadfastly to the music and swept the others along with her. The Cat and the Witch disappeared just before the end of the play, and the Prince and Princess sang an appealing duet that brought them before the curtain a dozen times and forced them to repeat until the tired orchestra faltered and gave in.

Then came dancing in the gymnasium—where the eight bouquets made their first public appearance—refreshments—and more congratulations.

"Everything is just lovely," Betty declared, sitting out a dance with Bob, her glowing eyes resting contentedly on the scene before them. "Ada was as nice as she could be to-night—and Bobby has more patience with Libbie than she used to have."

She was thinking of Miss Anderson's remark that she hoped the operetta would succeed in "welding a better school spirit among the girls."

"I wonder—" thought Betty, drifting off into a dream of her own.

She considered the dream more thoroughly after lights were out that night. Surely a better school spirit would mean better work and greater happiness.

"Miss Martha has gone to bring her sister back, Betty," said Mrs. Eustice, early in the week following the play. "Miss Harriet writes me that her face is greatly improved."

Betty was suddenly very busy for the next two days. She paid many visits to the rooms of other girls, she seemed to be talking and arguing with Ada and Ruth Gladys Royal. She even had a secret conference with George and with Dave McGuire, who, since the departure of Towsky, had done his duties and their own cheerfully.

"George will stop at the express office," whispered Betty to Bobby, as she passed her on the stairs the morning the two Nevins sisters were expected. Bobby nodded and smiled as though she understood.

The bus was back from the station before assembly was called, and Betty disappeared from view and was not in her accustomed place when the girls went into the study hall.

The school looked eagerly toward the platform, anxious to see how Miss Harriet looked.

"Brand new dresses!" whispered Libbie to Louise. "Miss Harriet looks pale, doesn't she?"

She did look pale, but infinitely better. The cruel scars that had drawn down her mouth, giving her a doleful expression, had been removed by skillful treatment, and her face was almost smooth. The surgeon had been successful with her hands, too, and they lay white and fair in her lap. She looked years younger and far happier. She and her sister were better dressed than the girls had ever seen them, and now indeed they seemed for the first time to be what, in truth, they had always been—young, intelligent, college-bred women.

Mrs. Eustice had finished reading the Chapter and was turning to her notices for the day when down the main aisle marched Betty, almost hidden beneath two large bouquets of American Beauty roses, extravagantly large and dewy flowers which in themselves explained the mysterious visit of George to the express office.

"Mrs. Eustice," said Betty clearly, "these flowers are for Miss Harriet and Miss Martha, from their girls in the second year Latin and history classes. Every girl in these two classes gives her sincere good wishes with the roses."

Mrs. Eustice leaned down and took the flowers, then turned to place them in the teachers' arms, smiling with a look in her eyes that Betty knew

meant she was pleased and touched and proud of her girls.

Miss Harriet stood up, her pale face catching a little of the exquisite glow of the roses she held.

"These are the first flowers that have ever been given to me," she said clearly, "and I shall remember them all my life."

Over her armful of flowers, Miss Martha faced the girls and suddenly tears began to rain down on the lovely buds.

"I'm only crying because I'm happy," she managed to stammer. "That's an odd way to say 'thank you,' but you'll have to forgive me."

Ada glanced covertly at Ruth Gladys Royal who sat beside her.

"I'm glad now we let Betty persuade us to contribute to the flower fund," she murmured. "It's nice to know every girl in both classes gave something. Somehow, the things Betty plans always come out right."

"Yes, don't they?" agreed Ruth, a little wistfully.

THE END

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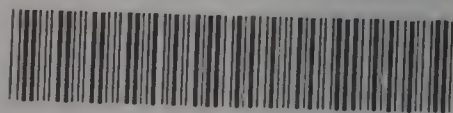
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